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Madeleine*

THE REMARKABLE NOVEL THAT WON THE GONCOURT PRIZE OF 1920

By Ernest Pérochon

WITH AN INTRODUCTION BY RICHARD LE GALLIENNE

THIS story, which has been the sensation of literary Paris, affords one more illustration of the artistic disinterestedness of French taste, so often misunderstood by the average Anglo-Saxon. Many of us are accustomed to think that only sophisticated themes appeal to the reading public of France; but here is a story of country life, written with extreme simplicity by a hitherto unknown school-teacher in the provinces, which last year snatched the much-coveted Prix Goncourt away from all the clever ones of Paris, and which has in a few months had a sale of seventy thousand copies.

The Prix Goncourt is a prize of ten thousand francs given yearly by the Académie Goncourt, founded by the famous Goncourt brothers, for the best book of the year. The impartiality of the judges, whoever they are, could not be better vindicated than by the fact that they thus chose for the laurel no volume issued by some fashionable Parisian house, but a book published at the author's own charges by a local printer of Niort, in the department of Deux Sèvres. The leading publishers of Paris, one after the other, had been given their opportunity by the author, Ernest Pérochon, and all of them, one after the other, had returned the manuscript to M. Pérochon with the usual polite regrets, thus missing the chance, as leading publishers have so often done, of sending forth a masterpiece—not to speak of a best-seller.

So it happened that when the Académie Goncourt made its award, no critic in Paris had heard of the book, and no bookseller could provide a copy. The fashionable firm

of Plon-Nourrit were not long in supplying a demand which no publisher, including themselves, had been wise enough to foresee, and thirty thousand copies went off immediately. M. Pérochon ends his book with this inscription: "Vouillé, Deux Sèvres, May 31, 1914"; so his work had to wait six years for its recognition. Doubtless the war had something to do with that.

The French title of M. Pérochon's work is "Néne"—a shortened form of the name of the central character, the girl *Madeleine*. For American readers it has been thought advisable to call it by the heroine's full name, rather than by an unfamiliar abbreviation.

The story has to do with a young peasant woman, who comes to take care of the farmhouse of *Michel Corbier*, a widower of thirty, left with two children, *Lalie* and *Joe*, and his old father. *Corbier's* love for his dead wife is such that no other women are anything to him; but the farm and the house have to go on, and before the story opens he has already tried two experiments with housekeepers. The first was a mere slut, careless and untidy, who neglected the house and gave no thought to the children. After she had gone, *Corbier* tried his sister-in-law, a hard-hearted, cold-blooded woman whose harsh manners made his life still less endurable.

At last he hires the sister of a neighbor, *Madeleine Clarandeau*, who is accustomed to work hard for her living, thrifty, strong, no beauty, but not uncomely, without much interest in men, and entirely without designs on the young widower. *Madeleine* is a type of the best peasant women in France, and her only thought is to do her duty.

It is necessary for the understanding of the peculiarly fine quality and significance of the story that neither the young widower nor his young housekeeper are sensualists. That disgusting person Freud could have found nothing to interest him in either of them. The man is occupied with his farm, his children, his old father, and the thought of his dead wife. The woman is occupied with the work for which she has been engaged—including the support of her mother—and for the romantic side of herself she has no time and scarcely any thought.

Yet the womanhood in her is stirred, as she enters *Corbier's* farmhouse—the farmer being away in the fields—by the lonely and unkempt little children, whom she meets on the threshold, and toward whom she immediately takes up the rôle of mother, along with the other duties which she finds facing her. Previously she has been accustomed to working twelve hours a day side by side with men, in the fields, reaping and sowing, doing all the hard work of peasant women from time immemorial. Her first glance of *Corbier's* house awakens all her sense of order and cleanliness, and appeals to the strongest elements of her fine character.

The later course of the story is left to the reader, who will find in it one of the simplest and most pathetic pictures of life drawn by any writer. In our own time perhaps Thomas Hardy has come equally close to the bleeding heart of humanity; but Mr. Hardy, with all our memories of his Wessex tragedies, seems after all to be a literary man, a conscious artist, compared with this Frenchman, who writes like a Greek.

When I say that M. Pérochon writes like a Greek, I mean, first of all, that he writes with that athletic economy of language which only one other race, save his own, has understood—the race that gave us the odes of Horace and the despatches of Cæsar. But he is Greek in other ways—Greek in the austere presentation of the tragedy of merely being alive and abiding the issue, with fate and the terrible gods as an implacable background. He shows us lives without hope, and accustomed to fear—therefore, acquainted with courage. He passes no moral judgments on his *dramatis personæ*. He has no praise for those who suffer for their own goodness, except that best praise which is the implicit sense of pity.

Life is what this writer sees—life, with all its dangers, all its glamours, all its despairs, its doom, its loveliness, its loneliness, its glory, and its anguish; and, through it all, the sound of the breeze blowing over the woods and across the reeds, the huge, fertile,

blossoming earth, all seed and bloom, drift of leaves that turn again to flowers, and the everlasting Sorrow of the Joy that mates and unmates and mates again. He sees the earth, with all its little lives, so apparently small, and yet so incalculable in their mysterious significance.

Æschylus and Theocritus—of course, on a smaller scale, yet alike in quality—are to be found in this book by Ernest Pérochon, who but a short time ago was only a schoolteacher in Niort, Deux Sèvres, but is now laureled as a writer who has not only won the Prix Goncourt, but has succeeded in moving the hearts of many thousands of readers.

Richard Le Gallienne

I

THE air was fresh and full of life. The damp earth steamed. Behind the plow a thousand little exhalations mingled, each well defined, separate, subtile. They seemed to be trying to rise far above the earth, as if glad to escape at last from the weight of the clods; and then they turned aside and were lost like falling feathers. The steaming breath of the oxen rose above the team, covering the six animals with a whiter mist, animated by whirls of tiny flies.

A flock of small gray birds — wagtails —followed the plow, flying from one furrow to another. One hardly perceived them as individual birds, but was aware of their presence in great numbers, chasing the slow and awkward insects exposed to the light. At the upper end of the field a magpie stood out clearly.

High above the mist the sunshine held sway, wonderfully golden. Even the wooden parts of the plow glowed bright, and the blade, turned up toward the sun, resembled a short sword—the sword of a dwarf knight, heavy and slow.

Two men were working there. The younger, a lad of seventeen or eighteen, with loose-jointed limbs and enormous hands, was spreading the manure. He sang as he worked. His boyish voice quavered out with occasional breaks; nevertheless, it carried the melody through the vibrating air.

The other worker did not sing, and yet, like his companion, he felt the joy of the moment. He had been resting over Sunday, and now, at the beginning of another week of toil, his tools seemed light. He was tall and straight, with well-proportioned head and rather long legs. His round hat, pushed to the back of his head, left uncovered his thin, brown, clean-shaven face. His black eyes had a quick, roving glance.

He drove his animals with measured gestures and in silence. He had expected to find the earth very dry, and had harnessed three yokes of oxen for a deep plowing. Two of his steers were new to the yoke, but he had placed them in the middle of the team, and had immediately put them to so hard a test that they were soon brought under full control, weary and trembling. Even at the end of the furrow, where it is so hard to turn about, they meekly followed their leaders. The plowman had only to lift his plow and turn it without any fear that he would be pulled off by his team.

He placed his regulator at the last notch, and the blade bit deep into the rich soil. The moist clods of earth crumbled and fell apart of themselves in the sun; a light harrowing, and the ground would be ready for the seed.

The eyes of the plowman laughed, because all his thought was on his labor, and his task was the kind he liked.

As he passed ten feet from the hedge, a voice asked:

"How goes the work?"

"Mighty well," he answered.

"Grand weather!" said the other.

"Yes, lucky for us!"

The tiller of the soil stopped his team. Between two branches of a nut-tree appeared the big blond head of a giant.

"Good day, Cuirassier," said the plowman. "Is it you? I didn't know your voice."

"It's me. Hello, Corbier. You have a strong team and a fine plow!"

"I'm not complaining," said Corbier, with a touch of pride.

They were silent for a moment, while they looked approvingly at the powerful bodies of the oxen and at the new plow lying out flat like a strong, lean bird.

Then Corbier lifted his head and asked:

"What news, Cuirassier?"

"Nothing much. I've just brought my

sister to your house. You haven't forgotten that you engaged her for to-day?"

"Not at all! But I didn't think of it in connection with you. It wasn't you I engaged. Your hands are a bit large for housework."

The other broke into a laugh that showed his white teeth.

"Aren't you stretching out Sunday a little?" Corbier suggested.

Cuirassier's laugh broke off.

"I'm not a city fellow. One little spree doesn't put me in bed, or upset my work days. You ought to know that, Corbier!"

"I didn't mean to offend you. Excuse me, Cuirassier!"

"No harm done. Usually I'm at my work by this time; but to-day is my own. In my bargain with the boss I kept out four days for my mother—one before winter, to get in the wood; two for the garden; and the other for odd jobs."

"I see," said Corbier.

The younger man, his tongue once loosened, ran on.

"This morning I've been spading since sun-up, and the ground worked well. I spaded the whole garden, and spaded it deep, too. Nobody will have to weed it after me!"

Corbier nodded.

"Then," continued Cuirassier, "Madeleine found me in the garden and asked me to help her. I took this bundle of clothes and carried it by the main road within sight of the Moulinettes. From there I cut across lots, because I don't like to be seen on the road in working hours."

"Right!" said Corbier.

"It was to please her that I put myself out. Madeleine didn't really need me. I don't want to boast about her, Corbier, but, speaking of a woman's strength, she has few equals in all these parts. Now I'm off. Good luck!"

The man having disappeared, Corbier turned his plow and commenced a new furrow; but his thoughts, instead of being on his animals and his work, wandered off to less pleasant subjects. This chance meeting had stirred him to the depths, as his plow stirred the earth. Sadness lay on his heart like a heavy mist through which no sun could penetrate, and where no bird flew.

Between him and the tall young fellow whom he called Cuirassier, but whose real name was Jean Clarandeau, there had never been anything but the ordinary exchange of good-will; and as for this Madeleine, about to become his servant, he hardly knew her. No, these people had nothing to do with his sorrow; but they recalled his heavy burden to mind.

A widower at thirty, Michel Corbier had been left alone with a farm to manage and two little children to care for. His father still remained with him, to be sure, but the old man was crippled so much of the time that he was more often an added burden than a help. There was no one to lend a hand, little money, and no thrifty housewife in the home.

His misfortune had lasted eleven months; to him it seemed eleven years.

At first he had hired an old woman to do the work of the house. She was very good and very gentle with the little ones, but untidy and absolutely incapable of directing the household.

Next came his sister-in-law. Efficient, this one, but a shallow creature with no tenderness for the children. Moreover, she made her intentions toward the widower only too manifest, and it became necessary for them to separate after an unpleasant scene.

Finally his old father had engaged this Madeleine Clarandeau. Corbier knew the family. The mother, a widow and aging fast, worked out by the day. The children, three girls and a boy, were employed on farms. The lad Cuirassier had the reputation of being a good farm-hand; somewhat given to drink, it was said, and pugnacious when he had taken a glass too much. Of the girls of the family Corbier had seen less — of the eldest, Madeleine, least of all, as she had been employed in another province.

Now this unknown woman was to run his home. She was a big, strong girl, her brother said. Corbier did not like the idea. Clumsy hands were hardly the ones to care for Lalie and his little Joe. His father had promised her high wages. No doubt she would be a stolid creature, cheerful and aggressively healthy. Corbier saw nothing pleasant in the prospect before him.

The oxen, no longer feeling his eye on them, suddenly pulled to one side, dragging the plow. He yelled at them. The young farm-hand near by paused in his work, with a song still on his lips. Corbier called out to him:

"A little speed, in Heaven's name!

That's worth more than such a foolish noise."

The other was silent for a moment; then he insolently began a loud whistling of the same tune, and continued his work as slowly and awkwardly as before.

Corbier returned to his gloomy thoughts. Why did Marguérite die? He began to murmur softly words that only aggravated his anguish.

"Marguérite, why did you leave me so soon? Why did you leave my house for heaven? Why are you no longer waiting for me in the doorway when I come home from the fields? Marguérite, the children fare ill in the hands of strangers. The sun no longer shines for me, and my heart finds no joy in all the world."

He had come upon a hard piece of ground; he must urge the oxen forward.

"Come, Galant! Come, Vermeil!"

His voice died away in a sort of tremolo, he bowed his head, and the tears that he could no longer restrain brimmed from his eyes and rolled down his cheeks.

II

MADELEINE CLARANDEAU was nearing the Moulinettes. She had never been at the farmhouse of the Corbiers, but her brother had pointed out the way, and besides, she could see its red roof through the branches of the surrounding trees.

She stopped for a moment to gaze upon the place that was to be her home. From a distance it looked attractive and cheerful. Nevertheless, she feared that she might not fit into her new life.

Hitherto she had lived only on large farms, where the work was hard, but simple and enjoyable. She had gone where she was ordered, with no care except to have her task well done. They said, "Wash," and she washed twelve hours at a stretch, ate her soup, and went to bed. In summer somebody said, "Reap," and she took her sickle and followed the men. This made her day's work hard, because between times she would always have her woman's work to do as well; but no one had ever said:

"Buy and sell; weigh the butter, give the thread to the weaver."

Above all, no one had ever said:

"Take this little child up and wash him. If he cries, try to comfort him. Punish him, if necessary. Care for him, and win his affection."

She had never directed anything or any one. Whenever any one spoke of children to her, she would reply:

"I don't like them hanging around my skirts; they get in my way!"

When old father Corbier came to engage her, she refused at first. The old man insisted, and enumerated the advantages that he offered her—to be in the position of part owner, instead of having always to obey others; and to live so near to her mother's house. He added that since his lameness kept him at home most of the time, he would help her look after the children. Finally he offered her good wages. He put the case so well that she yielded, not a little pleased at the high esteem in which he seemed to hold her as a clever and capable woman.

As she drew near the place, her fears returned. She walked slowly. The little creatures of the hedge scattered as she passed. The lizards, startled among the primroses and wild pansies, drew back swiftly and silently. The titmice and bullfinches rose from their nests and mounted to the higher branches. The blackbirds flew away suddenly with a great noise of wings; but none of these birds went very far. Madeleine felt that they remained hidden there among the willows and holly-bushes, whence they peered out at her distrustfully.

"What does she want of us, this creature whose heels make such a noise?"

But as she went straight on, they regained confidence and began to sing. The girl lifted her head toward them and thought:

"Birds of my new home, I hear your song of welcome. Thank you, darlings!"

Her blue eyes lighted up her sunburnt face.

"Little musicians of Paradise, are you making the music for my wedding? So be it! But I am an old maid, and I have no beau!"

A small reddish object suddenly darted out from the hedge. She uttered a startled exclamation:

"Bad luck!"

Before her, ten feet away, a squirrel was crossing the road. It was a sign of sudden death. She passed on quickly, and turned to look at the little animal, which bounced away with uncanny agility.

She reasoned with herself. Squirrels were plentiful in this country of nut-trees.

One could not help encountering them; the fear of them was an old-fashioned superstition. She shrugged her shoulders and forced a smile; but it seemed to her that the sparrows fell silent, slipping away under the low branches.

Exactly in the middle of the road a strange shadow wavered. Lifting her eyes, Madeleine saw a bird of prey which hovered high up in the air. In the sunshine its great brown wings seemed quite black.

When Madeleine reached the Moulinettes, the woman who had come in by the day was gone, and she found herself alone in the house with the children. Ten o'clock struck. It was time to think of getting dinner. She lighted the fire and put on a kettle.

One child, seated in a corner near the table, eyed her with curiosity.

"What is your name?" asked Madeleine.

"Lalie," answered the little one.

She might be four years old. She was dirty, and was dressed like a little old woman in a blouse and gathered skirt; but her unkempt appearance was redeemed by her black eyes and curly locks.

"Will you kiss me, Lalie?"

The child began to twist her skirt and lowered her head, smiling.

"Won't you kiss me? You needn't be afraid. Do you like candy, Lalie?" Madeleine drew a little bag out of her pocket. "Take one! It's for you."

The child kept on twisting and twisting her skirt.

"Take it, Lalie, take it! Do please take it, that's a good girl!"

Lalie burst into sobs.

"That's enough for now," thought Madeleine. "She is timid. It is because she doesn't know me. What shall I say to the poor thing?"

She emptied out the candy on the table, within reach of the child, and withdrew, baffled.

Then she approached the cradle. Drawing back the curtain, she saw a little round head and two plump cheeks. Truly this baby boy was as beautiful as an infant Jesus! On the coverlet his little hand lay half open, white on the back and rose color inside.

Madeleine bent over and with her hard finger touched the delicate palm whose surface was like the smooth skin of an onion. The little hand closed upon her finger. She tried to take it away, but the baby held it tight. What could she do? If she tried hard to get free, he would wake up.

She waited a while, feeling very foolish. Her cheeks burned, her legs trembled. If anybody came, he might ask her what she was doing there, motionless, beside the cradle.

An hour passed; was she going to make the men wait for their dinner the very first day?

No! The baby awoke, and all of a sudden burst out crying. She rose in haste.

He looked at her for a minute, he explored her unfamiliar face with his hands; then, reassured, he began to chatter and play. He pinched Madeleine's nose, jabbed at her eyes, pulled her hair. He arched his little body, made a spring, and hurled his head against her with his soft mouth wide open.

Eleven o'clock! It could not be! She tucked the baby up in his warm bedclothes and ran to her housework.

When Corbier came home with the hands, an hour later, he found the two children in a happy mood and the table properly set. Madeleine, who was kneeling beside little Joe, rose to her feet and held herself erect before the farmer, blushing a trifle, astonished to find him so young.

He spoke a few words of welcome and sat down at the table. He decided that she was not very pretty, but honest-looking and good-natured. Can it be, he thought, that she will really give her strong arms to the service of my house and her heart to my little ones?

That hope gave him a feeling of comfort; and when she set before him a bowl of soup, he ate with a good appetite.

III

Michel Corbier and Madeleine Clarandeau were of the same race, a singular race living in an obscure part of France.

At the time of the Revolution, when they killed the king, all the people here, ancestors of the Corbiers, the Clarandeaus, the Fantous, and the others taking sides and following their beloved priests, arose and plunged into the struggle that rent the soul of France. Victorious in their first encounter, they followed it up with a second attack on the men of their own kind. The two sides fought desperately behind young warriors with eyes tender as a woman's, or led on by old veterans of granite strength.

The towns of that region were taken, retaken, sacked, and burned. Men fought in all the sunken roads, in all the broom-fields, in all the clearings. There was not a parish, even now when more than a century had passed, which did not have its battle mound, its "grave of the Bluecoats" or its "Calvary of the Chouans."

In the end the peasants had been beaten. Other governments had come, and had made peace with the priests; had pacified them so far that many had sanctioned the new state of affairs and preached sermons of loyalty. Only the most bitter, the most unyielding, had continued the war in their hearts; and their flocks had followed in their fierce isolation, in their disdainful defiance of menaces and excommunication.

One by one the old leaders had died and their flocks had been dispersed. Now, after six-score years, one seldom found any of these rebels, these Dissenters, as they were called, except in the Bocage section of the Vendée, where there remained a few little islands—buffeted, crumbling, but not yet submerged by the tide.

St. Ambroise was the most important and also the most compact and sturdy of these. It boasted about a thousand Dissenters. They had held out well, being a compact body, and having been reenforced by some Protestants. That was another tribe with good powers of resistance and tenacity—these Protestants. They hailed from the Fontenaisian country, where their ancestors had been among the first to receive the new Calvinist doctrines. They had had troubles enough under the great kings, and the Vendéan royalists had made things hot for them, too. They had hidden themselves away, dispersed, and reappeared again a little farther inland—part of them in the commune of St. Ambroise, part in those of Chantepie and Château Blanc.

This particular district was a curious one, with its rival temples of worship, its Protestant chapel and its rich churches all about, their chimes proudly ringing. The most diverse traditions clashed there, and, although times had changed, at certain moments hate again shot forth into flame. The dialects varied from one household to another, as well as the fashions of dress, of eating and of household arts. The games they played were different; so were their songs, and the amusements of the young people.

The Dissenters excited a good deal of curiosity. They felt that their souls were different from the others, and feared to be made fun of, so they were seldom seen about. One time some strangers came to town — probably from Paris itself — who had flattered them into talking freely. After that, a long article about them appeared in one of the newspapers. It said that their chapel was a great barn of a building, ornamented with gingerbread saints and plaster statues of the Virgin. The writer spoke lightly, although probably meaning no harm, about their baptismal font and their relics — two things which the Dissenters themselves held very dear.

Their baptismal font, in other respects like all those that one sees in the Catholic churches, had this one difference—it was never emptied. The water had been blessed by their last priest, and that had been a long time ago. Since then, every day, a few drops had been added, so the water was always at the same level.

As for their relics, they were a collection of little white animals carved out of meat bones, with a pocket-knife, by an old peasant, now one of their saints. Granted, they were not as magnificent as the great statues that one saw in the towns; still there was nothing like them in the churches of St. Ambroise or Chantepie, where the very people who mocked would have been glad enough to have something as good. And anyway, when one attends family prayers with people, one does not say on leaving that their fire smoked and their chairs were uncomfortable.

After this experience the chapel had been closed to strangers. The Dissenters had put all their energy into resisting being submerged by the churches. They had no more priests of their own, and they despised the modern priests as one despises traitors; so they prayed alone, perhaps from pride, or partly from an obscure fear of who knows what. So they exaggerated their devotions, feasted all their saints, doubled their days of fasting, observed Lent inexorably. And thus forgotten heresies and ancient superstitions rooted themselves in this old Christian faith, as wallflowers sprout from the sides of an old building. The women directed the cult, the virgins teaching the catechumen and reviving faith in the healing powers of certain plants and fountains and in the veneration of trees.

The Dissenters seldom married outside their group. The girls, indeed, scarcely ever did so, but among the boys there were always a few with whom love overcame loyalty to tradition, and who allowed themselves to drift off into the wider stream of Catholicism.

This had happened in the house of Corbier, a proud line with strong traditions, but where passion was often the master. It had never been seen in the Clarandeau family, but there was danger of it. The son, the tall young fellow whom they called Cuirassier, was madly in love with a Catholic girl, a dressmaker of Chantepie. He swore to his mother and Madeleine that he would never change his faith, but they were not much comforted, knowing men to be weak and easily influenced.

IV

It was the season of long days. For the men, one kind of work followed another—the beets to be planted, the grain to take in, and the ground to plow for the winter cabbages. It seemed as if one would never be ready for the harvest. The oats were ripening fast, too fast, fairly roasted by the hot June sun.

For the women, it was the time to care for the young animals, the critical period when the most precocious of the little chickens and goslings were deciding either to perish or to grow up. It was the time to prepare for the late broods and to wean the little pigs that had been born in the spring; and all of this was exacting work. It was above all else a time dreaded by the cooks, when it was necessary to prepare four meals a day—four copious meals on account of so much work, and all out of a few vegetables and some dripping.

Madeleine rose early. From three o'clock in the morning her wooden shoes were clattering in the tile kitchen. "Men, get up!" Quickly she lighted the fire, picked the vegetables, ran to the salt-box. Four o'clock — prayers, which Madeleine .conducted, old Father Corbier giving the responses and everybody else listening, even the farm-hands, of whom one was Catholic and the other Protestant.

Half past four—the table to set, the cow to milk, the cream to separate, the pots, the dishes, the little ducks, the children—always on the run!

She finished by nine o'clock at night, sometimes at ten, when the men were already asleep. She knew everything that ought to be done in a house for the comfort of man and beast, but she lacked the experience of systematizing. She also lacked knowledge of the best methods of doing things. For instance, she didn't know how to make the little ducklings eat from her hand the tidbits left from the table. When showers threatened, she ran frantically after her chickens, shaking her handkerchief wildly in one hand and her apron in the other.

"Run for shelter, little chicks!" she would call to them.

But she forced them to go too straight and too fast. The little chickens, with peeps of fright, dispersed around the haystacks, while the hen mothers spread their wings in rage. Madeleine would grow angry, too, and the storm would be on them.

Just then Lalie would appear in the doorway of the house.

"Joe is crying!" she would shout, but Madeleine wouldn't listen.

"Joe is crying, so there! Lalie didn't hit him!"

"Let him cry," Madeleine would say.

The little girl would go back into the house, but in a minute she would reappear.

"Joe is crying! There's a pin sticking in him."

Madeleine came back quickly, abandoning the chickens. She well knew that Joe had no pin sticking in him, but that word, often repeated, always made her tremble. The truth of it was that one evening, when she was changing the baby, she had pricked him, as she tried to hurry, with her clumsy fingers. The child had given a quick cry, quite different from his cries of temper, and Madeleine had started, gasping. For a full hour she had rocked the little one in her arms, full of remorse. When night came, she took the baby to the bed which she already shared with Lalie, and pressed him close to herself.

"Joe has a pin sticking in him!" Ten times a day Lalie made her start and run with a shiver down her back.

Already she had begun to love the little orphans, though they gave her more trouble than anything else. Lalie was into everything. Joe wanted to follow her. He was beginning to walk, and he fell every few minutes. Being of a quick temper, he cried and stamped his foot all day long.

"If I were their mother," Madeleine thought, "I would hire a girl to take some

of the outside work off my hands, and I'd give my time to the children. As it is, I never have the time. They mess around and play without me, and I haven't won their love, if they have mine."

Father Corbier, who was to have helped her so much, was just now lured by the sunny weather, and never in the house. He always seemed to be busily engaged and in a hurry.

"Our servant," said the old man, "doesn't keep her two feet in the same shoe."

"No," was the answer; "and it's a good thing she doesn't!"

At the other farms where she had lived, Madeleine often thought of her mother while working, or of her sisters, or of the village where she was born, or of friends, or of things her admirers said. Now, she was always worried about the animals, or the people in the house, and her thoughts never went very far afield. She hardly knew the surroundings of the farm — she who had rejoiced in advance that there was such a beautiful pond at the Moulinettes, shaded with pines and chestnuts. She hadn't even taken the time to go near it. She had only said to herself:

"I hope that the children won't get in the habit of going down there."

As for the house, she knew every bit of that, and liked it well enough. There were two large rooms divided by a corridor, a smoke-house, and a dairy. All this was neatly tiled in the old-fashioned way.

One of the bedchambers was furnished with two dressers of prettily grained ash and two tall and handsome four-poster beds, in which Michel Corbier and his father slept. The other room, which they considered very choice, held a mixture of furniture. At the side of a brown cupboard there stood a big brown chest, a high clock with a black case, a new-fashioned bed, and a clothes-press of cherry, all beautifully finished. This bed and clothes-press had been bought by the young couple. They had an air of newness in this old house, but as they were beautiful pieces of furniture, simply and carefully made, they looked attractive and not too showy.

Madeleine found the old chimney-place the most curious thing of all at the Corbiers'. She wasn't at all surprised at the images of saints, or at the rosary made of enormous pieces of boxwood, which undoubtedly had never been used to pray with. One always found such things in the Dissenters' homes, but nobody ever saw anywhere firearms like theirs, and nowhere else was there such an old document, framed with such care.

The weapons were two long pistols. One hundred and twenty years before, the young commander of the local forces had given them to one of the Corbier family, his favorite companion, as a token of friendship.

The framed paper was a piece of parchment, on which had been inscribed an event of the war. This same adventurous son of the Corbiers had forced an entrance into one of the rudely fortified towns, along with his friend the commander. At the bottom was a sprawling signature, that of the commander. To the left, the writer, who must have known mighty well how to use his pen, had drawn a picture. It showed a great wall and two ladders, at the top of which stood two men with raised swords. Time had made the drawing indistinct, but the Corbiers could explain these things very well when one asked them about it, and they were very proud of it.

The old man had begged Madeleine not to touch these treasured relics, and she had been a little vexed, as she considered herself capable of handling them. Sometimes in the evening, when the men were in bed, she longed to burnish up one of the old pieces and make them shine, as she did the chandelier and the brasses in the house. She never dared, however.

It was when she was thus alone, with no one around to bother her, that she did her work rapidly and silently. With perfect freedom of movement she recovered her natural pace. She put things to rights, and made preparations for the next day's work.

When all this was done, she drew up the baby's cradle close to her bed and slipped in beside little Lalie. The first few nights she had not slept well. Lalie burrowed like a little chicken, her head in Madeleine's neck. Accustomed to sleeping alone, the girl had not rested comfortably; but now that she was used to it, when the baby slipped away, Madeleine never failed to wake and to cuddle the little head against her shoulder.

V

On a Sunday in July, Michel Corbier was at St. Ambroise, and Madeleine was in

charge of the house. She was saying her prayers alone with the children.

Boiseriot, one of the farm-hands, came in. This was also his day on duty. He sat down at the table and called out:

"Soup, soup!"

Madeleine paid no attention, as it was the time for prayers.

"The soup! The soup!"

Boiseriot began to bang on the table with the handle of his knife. Before his employers he would never have shown his impatience at such a moment. Madeleine got up, put down her rosary, and silently placed the soup before him; then, as he seemed to be smiling in a disagreeable way, she turned her back and walked away.

She didn't like this man. He was a bachelor, small and commonplace in appearance, not much of a talker, and surly. He was a good farm-hand nevertheless, with a stronger physique than one would suppose. Madeleine distrusted him because he looked at her rudely, with a strange gleam in his eyes.

At twenty-seven, after fourteen years of farm service, she had had plenty of opportunity to discover that men can be troublesome. She knew how to defend herself good-naturedly. A little teasing didn't frighten her, and she could give a good slap if necessary. She did not know, however, how to deal with this silent man with bold eyes.

In the evening, when the little ones were asleep, she went down into the courtyard. Suddenly she remembered that the men's beds had not been made. The men slept in a loft at the end of the granary, and she went over there.

As she was crossing in front of the stable, she saw Boiseriot stretched out on some fresh straw. As she passed, he sat up and caught her by the leg. She pulled away and tried to pass on, but he sprang up and threw himself at her like a wild beast.

With one swing of the arm, she gave him such a blow that he seemed dazed; but he did not stop, so she faced him squarely and gave him another blow.

"You devil!" she said. "I'll tell the boss!"

"You've not always been so stuck up!" he growled.

"Boiseriot, I don't understand you."

"Well, I suppose you will tell the boss. It wouldn't surprise me. I'll be bounced—that's certain. As it is, you do what you like in the house; but I'll tell everybody what I know!"

"What do you mean, Boiseriot?"

"I'll tell them all! I'll bring everybody in the neighborhood and make a noise outside the door while—"

Madeleine bent over to listen to the man's lying words. A great rage shook her.

"Oh, you wretch!" she said. "Take that!" She struck with closed fist, like a man. "There, you dog! There, you snake! I hope that will do you. You miserable fellow, if I didn't have pity on you I would grind you under my heel!"

To keep from striking him again, Madeleine ran off and into the men's quarters, where she relieved herself by violently shaking a feather bed.

Boiseriot picked himself up and brushed off his rumpled clothes. With an evil gleam in his eye, he sent a threat in her direction.

"I'll make trouble for you yet!" he muttered angrily.

VI

THAT evening little Joe was taken with colic. Every one was sleeping, except Madeleine, when the child began to be restless and to moan. Madeleine rocked his cradle. While she was singing, for a minute, half asleep, she listened to the even ticking of the clock.

Suddenly the child cried out and struggled. She sprang quickly to the foot of the bed, slipped on her petticoat, and lighted a candle.

The little one kept crying more and more. She could not find that anything had hurt him; so he must be ill. It was perhaps a severe illness that had gripped him so suddenly.

She began to walk the floor with him in her arms. As he did not quiet down, she opened the door and called out:

"Corbier! Corbier! The baby is sick! I don't know what is the matter. I am worried about him!"

Corbier came at once, in his nightclothes, and barefooted, only having taken the time to put on his trousers. Madeleine raised the child a little in her arms, and both of them looked anxiously at the little suffering bit of humanity.

"Corbier, the fire must be lighted," said Madeleine.

"I will go and do it," replied Michel.

He went out, came back with some kindling and set to work, blowing into the ashes on the hearth. She was obliged to kneel beside him to help him. Finally the fire flamed up. Madeleine sat down and held the baby out toward the warmth.

"If only we had some herb tea," she said.

He prepared some marshmallow tea. Madeleine got little Joe to drink it, and immediately the child quieted down. Apparently all right again, he bounced up and down before the fire. His cheeks still wet with tears, he laughed aloud at the flying sparks, as his father waved a burning brand, which made a pretty ribbon of fire.

How foolish they had been to excite themselves in this way! They looked at each other, moved by a common feeling of tenderness.

Suddenly Madeleine blushed. In her hurry she had hardly dressed at all. Her underwaist was unbuttoned, exposing all her throat, and her chemise gaped over her firm white breast.

The evil words of the farm-hand rang in her ears.

"You've not always been so stuck up!" Boiseriot had said.

Thanking Corbier for his help, she hastily lifted up the baby and put him back in his cradle.

The baby had fallen asleep again. Corbier had gone back to bed, and Madeleine kept watch. She was ashamed of her imprudence, and completely upset by thoughts that had never before troubled her.

She was not in love with Corbier. She could not love him yet. Like all girls of her age, she had had sweethearts. Some of them she had sent away; others had left her. When a beau proved fickle, she had been vexed for a time, but she had always got over it easily enough. No, she was not a girl to lose her head all of a sudden.

She was not in love with Corbier. She loved the children, and this love was a pure and blameless feeling. Oh, certainly, he was a good-looking man, this young farmer; and later, if he sought her honest love—one had heard of stranger happenings—should she say yes or no?

To the muffled ticking of the pendulum in the tall clock, the hours of the night were flying. Madeleine lay with her eyes wide open, staring into the blackness of the room.

VII

Old Father Corbier had time and again warned Gideon, one of the young farm-hands at the Moulinettes.

"Don't tease Giant! He is bad-tempered, and you'll end by making him dangerous."

Usually when this subject came up at table, a long discussion followed, full of apologies and explanations.

Giant was a descendant of a certain Marjolée, a cow that the old man had bought twenty years previous at a great cattle-fair, during one of those winters that one never sees any more. This Marjolée came from Nantes, and was a sleek and well-built animal, beautiful from head to foot. Try, if you will, to find such a cow nowadays! She had been the mother of Griselle, who was the mother of Farinière, who had been the mother of Pomponne and of Giant, the gray bull with the black collar.

A strong family of animals, unequaled for work and fairly quick to fatten; but unfortunately they were too frisky. The cows were rough to their stable companions, broke down the hedges, and jumped over the fences. As for the bulls, they had to be broken in very young, otherwise they became dangerous. It had been done a little too late in the case of Giant, because he was very handsome.

"Giant will tickle your ribs!" said the old man.

His son and the two young farm-hands shrugged their shoulders, used as they were to live in the midst of cattle.

Gideon never came near the bull without teasing him. The bull resented it, clanking his chain, lowering his head with a long, threatening bellow which rumbled in his great throat. The farm-hand mocked him:

"Moo-oo, boo-oo! Come on, Giant!"

Sometimes he grasped the horns of the bull with his fists, and the bull in play pushed hard.

Little by little things got worse, but the lad did not leave off. He took a keen pleasure, when he was alone, in trying his young strength to the point of danger. He really fought with the beast, kicking him with his wooden shoes, but carefully avoiding the dangerous horns.

Finally the bull became ugly. As Gideon came in to feed him, Giant lunged, and

the young man had barely time to jump out of the stall, dropping his armful of fodder.

"What is the matter with you?" said Michel Corbier, who was coming in.

"It is Giant, boss. If I hadn't jumped quick, he would have hooked me into the manger!"

Michel did not like the affair.

"Why don't you leave him alone? You don't need to tease the animals and spoil their tempers, especially when you are a coward."

"A coward? I am no more so than any other, but animals are all alike, and I don't care to be trampled on."

"Very well, leave him alone, and I'll take care of him myself."

"Look out for him, I warn you!"

Corbier shrugged his shoulders and went to get an armful of hay. The bull had never shown him any ill-will.

"Turn around, Giant!" he ordered.

He threw his armful, then noticed that the fodder had fallen under the animal's feet.

"You rascal, spoiling my hay!"

He leaned down, picked up a fistful, and started to stand up again, when the bull struck him with his horns. He rolled over on the ground with a cry of pain and surprise. He succeeded in getting partly up, and had time to slip into the rack. Happily Gideon had not gone far. Although Michel had called him a coward, he jumped to the head of the beast promptly enough.

"Help, Boiseriot! Help!" he called.

The beast was straining at his stanchion, a solid oak beam, fretting and champing and rolling wild eyes. Boiseriot came running from the granary with a heavy iron bar. Madeleine also arrived on the scene. Seated between two cows, she had jumped up at the first cry, overturning her stool and dropping her pail. She attacked the bull from behind, trying to tie his hind legs and throw him. She was struck by a hoof and rolled over on the straw.

Boiseriot thrust at the beast with his iron bar, but ineffectually, for he was hindered by Gideon, who was hanging on to the bull's horns and muzzle.

"A rope!" Corbier shouted.

Madeleine had already thought of it. She ran to the granary and came back with a leather strap. The bull gathered himself together for a final effort. Taking advantage of his action in drawing his hind legs together, she quickly knotted the strap and threw her weight back on it.

"Boiseriot!"

The boy turned around.

"Go to his side," said Madeleine. "I am going to throw him." A brief gleam flickered in the beast's evil little eyes. "Hurry up!" she cried in an even voice.

Boiseriot put his shoulder against the bull's flank, Madeleine gave a sudden pull on the strap, and Giant fell heavily.

Corbier got out of the rack. Though pale, he was not much hurt, and forced himself to laugh, his breath still coming in gasps. The farm-hands laughed too. Gideon wiped his right hand, which was bloody from the nostrils of the beast. Boiseriot looked at Madeleine, who was trembling so hard now that she was obliged to lean against the wall for support.

"Thanks, all of you," said Corbier, when he could get breath. "I can't talk. I am going to get a drink."

He went out of the stable, and Madeleine followed him. At the end of a moment she came back.

"Well," said Gideon, "is he better?"

"Yes, it is passing off," replied the girl. "As for me, I can't seem to pull myself together."

She took up her milking-stool and recommenced her work. Boiseriot, who was bringing in an armful of hay, watched her. In her agitation she went to work without noticing that she was milking a cow which had already been milked. He laughed meanly.

"You were afraid for him, weren't you?" he said in a low tone, brushing against her. "Devil take you, I'll get square with you!"

VIII

"Who was it who said that?" asked Cuirassier of his mother.

"I don't know," replied Mme. Clarandeau. "I only know that people are talking about it, and I am sorry."

"Who told you that people are talking about it?"

The old woman was agitated.

"Don't worry, my big boy. I can attend to such things better than you. We must not make a fuss."

She knew her son. Ordinarily gentle and good-tempered, he became quarrelsome after drinking; and with his great strength, there was always danger of some unpleasant incident.

"If you mix up in it, you will only make things worse," she insisted.

He shook his big head.

"Mother, look at me! I have not drunk any wine, and I swear that I will not drink any until I have got to the bottom of this affair; so there is nothing to fear. Tell me, who was it who said that Madeleine was living with Michel Corbier, of the Moulinettes, as his mistress?"

"What will you do to him if you find out?"

"I will speak to him. I know how. In order to stop a fellow who is doing wrong, it is only necessary to speak to him in the right way."

"And if it is a woman?"

"If it is a woman, you shall take care of the matter; but if it is a man, that concerns me. Who told you about this evil rumor?"

Mme. Clarandeau had to give in.

"Who told me about it? Marie Fantoune, this morning before chapel. It seems that it came from a farm-hand at the Moulinettes, a fellow named Boiseriot."

"From Boiseriot, you say? Very well! Good-by, mother. I will see you again on Sunday."

"Good-by, my son, and remember—no fighting!"

Upon the threshold he turned and spoke again.

"Don't worry! I haven't been drinking. Good-by!"

From Coudray to St. Ambroise Cuirassier almost ran. He was thinking:

"Boiseriot! I don't know him, but he must be from Chantepie. Violette was telling me one day about a trouble-maker of that name. To-day, Sunday, I shall find this crazy fellow at St. Ambroise."

When he had reached the town, he said to himself:

"Mother was right! One must not make a fuss. I don't know him. I might ask these fellows playing tenpins, but they would be suspicious. Let's not be so stupid."

He entered a tobacco-shop, bought a cigar, and then stopped to light it, leaning against the door and muttering:

"Well, well!"

"What are you looking at, Mr. Clarandeau?" the storekeeper asked.

"Nothing. I thought that was Boiseriot—that fellow passing by."

"Boiseriot?"

"Yes—he's one of the farm-hands at the Moulinettes."

The wife of the storekeeper explained to her husband:

"You know—the little one who chews. He just went out of the shop."

"Thank you very much, *madame*," said Cuirassier.

He went out quickly, hurried down the street, and soon caught up with the man he was seeking.

"Is that you, Boiseriot?" he called out.

"At your service."

"Well, I have something to say to you."

"What's eating you?" said Boiseriot, not without alarm.

"I was just going to tell you. You don't know me, do you?"

"Oh, yes! You are Jean Clarendeau, whom they call Cuirassier. You have a girl at Chantepie—Violette, the seamstress."

"Boiseriot, if I have, it is none of your business!"

"Pardon me. Violette is my god child."

Cuirassier gave a start, which did not escape his companion's notice. They walked on for some paces.

"Boiseriot, you have spoken ill of my sister and of the man she works for, and I don't like it."

The other, realizing the effort that Cuirassier was making to control himself, faced about.

"I'm not afraid of any man!" he said offensively.

"I don't want trouble with you," returned Cuirassier. "I want to settle the matter quietly. If I had been drinking, it would be different."

"Does that often happen?" Boiseriot inquired sarcastically.

"No oftener than I can help. Sometimes I get into bad company."

"Does Violette know your ways?"

Cuirassier would not be diverted from his purpose.

"That's not the point," he said, talking fast. "Somebody has spoken against my sister. For this time, let it pass; but if it goes any farther, I will take the slanderer, whether he be Peter or Paul, Dissenter or Catholic or Protestant, friend or stranger or enemy—I will take him and make his legs walk in the air till his head cracks. Good-by!"

Boiseriot began to laugh.

"You're strong, but you don't know much. Why should I speak ill of your sis-

ter and Corbier, and get into trouble with my own boss? Go and ask him if we ever had a word of difference between us."

"What I've said is said; and you may tell everybody else. Good-by!"

"Good-by—but I advise you to take the trouble to find out who your friends are."

They parted. Boiseriot, entirely over his fright, went off with an ugly smile on his lips. Cuirassier walked slowly away without turning around, his heart in a turmoil.

IX

SUNDAY again—a Sunday in the month of August, at the quiet hour of afternoon repose.

Michel Corbier was stretched out on his barn floor, his hat over his face. The flies had kept him awake at first, being active and noisy. Now that he had fallen asleep they kept on buzzing about him, but he had taken the precaution of covering his head with a wisp of straw, leaving exposed only his hard-skinned hands.

The sun shone straight down; the two piles of sheaves were like the walls of a corridor, keeping in the warm air. The sleeper gasped, roused by the furnace heat.

"Heavens!"

He had just wakened with a nervous tremor.

"Good Heavens! This is awful!"

Every time he took an afternoon nap it was the same. Could he never keep from dreaming? Was it impossible for him to enjoy the sound sleep of a tired man?

He never lay down without a strange sensation flowing in his veins. Vague forms passed before his sight—beings and objects that he could not make out. He dimly perceived the devilish dances of pretty fairies, sarabands from which the wind blew over his face and intoxicated him with a warm, unholy perfume.

At last he saw clearly; and it was not sometimes one thing, sometimes another. He always saw blue eyes as deep as sin, and then a whiteness that took shape, that became a woman's throat—an amorous throat, throbbing, rounding itself out till it ended by filling his whole vision with its triumphant white curve.

Then desire stirred in him like a tempest raised by a witch.

Lifting his shoulders out of the straw, he faced his shame. Sorrow filled his heart.

"Marguérite, in spite of all, I have not forgotten you!" he cried. "You are with me when I work. Your hand is again in mine, sweeter than all the hands of living women!"

His eyes were strained as if to behold more clearly the visions of his days of happiness—fleeting visions that he longed to retain; but other thoughts besieged him, intruders upon his will. Vainly he tried to drive them away like pestilent flies. They kept on buzzing, insistent, burning, obstinate, cruel.

He was glad to see his father get up at the other end of the barn and come toward him. His father liked to talk of the time, not yet long past, when life seemed to extend before Michel like a flowery path.

"Did you sleep, father?"

The old man sat down on the straw beside his son.

"Not long. The flies ate me up. How about you?"

"Oh! I—"

The word remained unspoken, and the old man was aware of the grief that filled the pause. He did not stir, but his eyelids rose and fell.

There had never been anything but kindness between father and son. They had a true affection, man to man—a silent tenderness, watchful and deep.

The father meditated a moment, seeking words of comfort. Finding none, he said, at last:

"Michel, don't borrow money this year. Sell your crops at once. You'll make a poor bargain, but it will be better to take your loss."

"What do you mean, father?"

"I mean that it will bring you in at least two thousand francs of good, hard coin. You might even do better."

Michel made a motion of remonstrance. He was far from such thoughts.

"What?" exclaimed his father, who misunderstood the gesture. "What? Two thousand francs, sure, at the lowest estimate. It is a pretty penny. You're crying before you're hurt."

Michel let him run on, glad to be diverted to these practical interests. Shortage of money was a familiar enemy with which he was used to wrestling. To change the direction of his thoughts he began to calculate expenses and earnings.

"Two thousand francs—that is a loss of at least three hundred. To come out even we must have fourteen hundred for the master, eight hundred and seventy for the

two hands, and how about the helpers? And the servant girl?"

"We mustn't borrow! That's the ruin of a family."

"Then what shall we do? Sell some land?"

The old man was moved.

"Sell? Not while I live, never! The field of Gros Chataignier has been in our family time out of mind, like a great estate. As for the two others, it was your dead mother and I that bought them. We skimped and pinched, many's the time, to get that land!"

"Father, you know that I, too, have worked hard; but I reap nothing but trouble, because I have no other sympathy except yours, and no other arms to help mine."

Beneath the mildness of the words a spirit of protest was in his tone. And the father felt it his duty to say:

"My boy, you have had bad luck; but what are you going to do about it? There's no use complaining. A man doesn't turn about, he doesn't give way—he goes ahead!"

"Well, I'll go ahead."

They stopped talking, motionless, their heads bent, too proud to show their emotions. Then the father went on with some hesitation, feeling his way cautiously.

"Yes, it is true, you have had trouble—and you are a good fellow, you deserve better luck. If you didn't have to pay a servant girl, for instance, you would save one of your expenses. Still, as it is, you are not doing so badly. Your house isn't going to rack and ruin, like some houses I know."

"Nonsense! Our house is just like all the rest!"

"No, be fair about it. That girl—you won't find another like her. I'm often in the house, and I see how things go. Well, I have noticed that she takes great pains. Watch her! Nothing is neglected. Go and see the stock, look at her milk-room. And then in another way she is better than another girl might be. Your children play happily about her like two little kittens in the sunshine. I tell you I can see that, my boy!"

"Maybe so, but a servant is a servant: you pay her and she quits. Her work is never like that of the one who is gone."

"Just so—I don't deny it. Well, my boy, when your grief passes—"

"It won't pass!" Michel protested.

"You say so, and no doubt it will never go altogether; but time is a great healer. Do you mind if I speak out, Michel?"

"Say anything you will," said the young man earnestly. "You can say anything to me, father."

"Well, my boy, you ought to marry again. Don't be hurt! I don't say this year or the next, you understand, but when your first grief has subsided. Just the same, the sooner you do so the better, for your house and your children. You have a good servant, but, as you say, she might leave from one day to another."

"And must I marry her to keep her?" Michel threw out the words suddenly, in an angry tone.

"I'm not thinking of her, or of any other girl; it's for you to choose. I only tell you, if you'll let me, that you need one of that kind — a good housekeeper who will be kind to the children, and who will bring them up in your religion."

"Father, don't let's talk about such things any more!" said the younger Corbier, with a quick shrug of his shoulders.

"There, now! I've made you angry!" exclaimed the father.

"Don't think that. I'm just going to walk a little; my foot's asleep."

Michel walked around the farm buildings, passing by the goat-yard in the rear. Nothing was neglected, his father had said, and he was forced to admit that it was true. The clothes were drying on the line, carefully hung. He saw the towels in rags, but very white. Why had Madeleine washed them so scrupulously? Was she hoping to get a husband?

He took the path to the pond. On fine Sundays like this he used to go down there with Marguérite and Lalie. In the shade of a big oak, beside the rippling water, he had passed some of the sweetest hours of his life.

He passed through the field. As in other days, the turf was yielding and his tread was silent. In the hedge, the hazel-nuts ripened in their little brown shells — the nuts that he had held out to Marguérite at the ends of the branches, and that she had cracked between her white teeth. As in other days, there was a cloth spread out near the tree where the blackbirds were flying. From that point one could see the whole pond, and, by leaning over a little, the round top of the oak in the shadow of which—

"Ah!"

He stood still, leaning forward.

In the shadow of the great oak, close to the rippling water, a young woman in her best Sunday dress played with a little child —as in other days!

X

For a week Lalie had begged Madeleine to take her to pick hazel-nuts. That Sunday Madeleine had yielded.

Since it was pleasant weather, she had dressed the children in their best. Having bought a little bottle of perfume for them that very morning, with her own money, she had put plenty of it on their hair, and the baby at her breast was like a fragrant bouquet.

In the field—how pleasant it was!—she had picked hazel-nuts. Then she drew near to the pond, walking slowly behind Joe, who toddled along. How the pond glittered in the sunshine!

In the shade of a tall oak she sat down and cracked the nuts. With her best knife, which she used only for grand occasions, she broke the brown nuts, to be gobbled up by two greedy little mouths.

"Down I went to my garden—
It seemed to me I flew, Colin!—
To pluck the rose and rosemary;
It seemed to me I flew."

Why, Madeleine was singing! Why such gaiety of heart? This pretty pearl-handled knife, so smooth that she hardly felt it in her hand—was it a present from a beau? Not at all. It reminded her of good dinners, but nothing beautiful, nothing that touched her heart. Then was it because the field was lovely? Because the pond glittered in the sun? Because the children laughed and smelled sweet like pleasant herbs?

No, no, none of these things explained it.

A nightingale came into my hand—
It seemed to me I flew, Colin!

Joe wanted to sing, too, and Lalie joined in with "Yoo! Yoo-oo!"

Said he to me in his Latin tongue:
"It seemed to me I flew!"

The sweetness of it rested upon Madeleine like the pressure of a hand. Trembling in her breast she felt an unreasoning joy, vast and yet delicate. She had felt like this when she was eighteen, on the mornings when the young people met for a holiday together. She was as light as a sparrow.

"Ah, what a foolish thing I am! A last rose of summer like poor me!"

"Madeleine! Come here and look! Oh, Madeleine!"

Lalie had gone close to the edge of the pond, and was throwing stones into the water.

"Madeleine, the fish!"

Madeleine went to the child. The water, which at a distance appeared black, was wonderfully clear. When anything fell into it, the fish came up from the depths. They were small roach, very lively; and one could easily see their yellow eyes, their rounded mouths, their pink gills, spread out like lace. They snapped up food so suddenly that one hardly saw it disappear.

"Hey! Hey! There's another — the greedy things!"

"Lalie, you mustn't lean over so far. Come, Lalie!"

Madeleine brought the children back under the oak-tree. She had been afraid of the water ever since she was little. A half-crazy old aunt had told her so many stories of fairies and dark water-witches that always when she looked into the sleeping water of ponds, she felt a kind of mysterious and dreadful fascination.

"You mustn't go near, don't you know that? In the water there are things that drag little children by the feet!"

"Let's play, Madeleine!" said Lalie, without listening to her words. "I'll be storekeeper, and I'll sell pins. Joe will be a little boy, and you'll be his mama. You will be in your house. You see? These little sticks are the pins. I will knock on the door—'Is anybody at home?' You will say, 'How do you do, *madame?* I want some pins to fasten my little boy's collar.' Do you hear, Madeleine? Joe's a little boy, and you're his mama. If you'd rather, they can be candies. Then Joe will say, 'Mama, I want some candy from the storekeeper.'"

"Little silly! You know very well he can't say that—listen to him!"

"Ma—ma—ma!" stammered little Joe.

"We must teach him, Madeleine! Joe, say 'Ma-ma, I want—'"

"Ma-ma-ma-oop!"

"You don't know how to play, Joe," said his sister. "Lalie is going to play all by herself."

Madeleine, flushing suddenly, had taken the baby by the arm. She held him facing her, her head close to his.

"Little Joe, my little Joe, say 'Ma-ma! Ma-ma!'"

She lifted pleading eyes. Her tender emotion of the afternoon culminated in this strange, unfamiliar impulse, which was like falling in love.

"Joe! Listen! Ma-ma! Ma-ma!"

"Madeleine!"

She turned, the blood leaped to her heart. Corbier was six paces away, behind the hedge.

In an instant Madeleine's eyes opened wide. In an instant she saw it all clearly. Then everything grew dark. Corbier, with a white face, lifted his hand as if to throw the words at her:

"Madeleine! It's a mortal sin! I forbid you to do such a wicked thing!"

XI

For three days Michel Corbier and Madeleine did not speak to each other. At meal-times the girl fed Lalie and little Joe and took her own meals standing up near the fireplace without a word.

Corbier spoke to his father, or to the hands, without ever turning his head toward Madeleine. Contrary to his habit, Boiseriot tried to joke. Out of his wrinkled face his wolfish eyes gleamed with malicious enjoyment.

On the second day Michel's father asked him what was the trouble.

"It's nothing," Corbier answered vaguely; "but I want it understood that after you I'm the only master here."

The master! Yes, he was master of the farm, the one who gave orders to the laborers, who laid out the work, the buying and selling; but he was not master of his own thoughts. He did not know what he had in his heart, whether tenderness or hate, kindness or anger. It was sure that he had pride there—pride enough to resist the natural impulses of his warm young blood; pride enough not to take back a sharp and unjust word.

Madeleine wept for shame. She wept for grief, too, because she had been cruelly wounded. This unacknowledged dream which had sprung up and flowered in her like a white bush hidden in the dense woods, but which now was withered, killed by a sudden blow, gave her intense pain. It was like a perfumed shrub destroyed by a single stroke of the ax, and now it lay dead in the garden.

It had been purely a jest—Lalie had begun it. Michel might have asked the child, then he would have understood! Because she loved the children she ought not to be blamed for their prattle. She loved the children very dearly—so dearly that perhaps she had lost her head. Perhaps it had occurred to her that Michel, seeing her love, might—

It was Wednesday evening, and Madeleine was feverishly clearing the table. The men had gone to bed; the children were sleeping.

"I will go away! I can't stay here after what he said. I was used to the place, and I loved the children. How I shall miss them, the darlings! But there shall never be others. No! I will go to a large farm, like the one where I lived last year. I'll be freer there. I ought to go at once. When I see him come in and sit with the others, not looking at me, it cuts me to the heart. He is angry. If he had ever spoken like that before, I mightn't mind it so much. No! I'll go away from the Moulinettes. Michel Corbier, you can hire somebody else—some one better-looking than I am. You can make her your wife for all I care!"

Madeleine threw down the duster with which she was rubbing the cupboard, but she picked it up again, thinking:

"I will go away, but I don't want the break to come from me. I'll do my duty to the end, and he shall have no fault to find. To-morrow, if he wants to pick a quarrel with me, I will get angry, and then good night! How can I manage it? Let me see. Oh, I know!"

She leaped up on a chair and took down the old pistols from the chimney-place, cut a large piece of emery-paper, and polished and polished them.

"Ah, my old shooting-irons, I'm going to make you shine like the candlesticks in chapel!"

That night she collected her belongings, so that she might be ready to pack them up at a minute's notice. She opened her cupboard, folded her skirts, searched for her handkerchiefs.

The children's things were mixed up with hers. In spite of her anger, she sorrowed at the thought of leaving them.

She took her bottle of toilet water and

set it on the desk. She had bought it for them, and would leave it for them. Then she thought that the girl who came to fill her place might take it for her own. She would not permit that!

She sorted out the vests, the stockings, the jumpers for Joe, and the frocks and hair-ribbons belonging to Lalie. Having spread them all out on the table, she emptied her bottle on them drop by drop, as if she were sprinkling the garments with holy water.

"Dear little ones, may it bring you happiness!"

She wished to do more for them, but it was late; so in order not to be heard she took off her sabots and tiptoed to her room.

Noticing a hole in Joe's stocking, she mended it. Lalie was growing so fast that her Sunday frock was short. She wouldn't look so well as other little girls who had mothers.

Madeleine had an apron of ancient stuff with red flowers. She cut it up to make a little girl's dress, and with a skill that astonished herself she lengthened the skirt and let out the belt.

Now it was midnight. She worked on, but a little less actively. The frock finished, she looked about to see what else she could do. Nothing! All the poor little things were arranged in order, clean and neat.

Madeleine wept. Where would she be in a couple of weeks? Who would be taking care of Joe? Would they persuade him to eat his thick soup? Would they give him a drink during the night? Twice a day he had a fresh egg, properly cooked. Would they have patience to feed it to him in little spoonfuls?

"My poor little ones!" she said to herself. "Perhaps, after all, the new mother whom your father will go to seek will be good to you. You will love her, you will think no more of Madeleine, and when you have grown up you will not remember me."

She wept again as she replaced the garments in the clothes-press.

"I can't stay here any longer. Your father is cruel, but I have been wicked, and he will never pardon me."

Treasured away in a box Madeleine had some ribbons, a ring, a pin, and a little silver necklace. She put the necklace under Lalie's hair; but as for Joe, she had nothing to give him that was suitable to his age. During the four months she had been at the Moulinettes she had not bought any trifle that would serve as a souvenir, for she had never thought that she would leave the place so soon.

Oh, well, at any rate she would keep him close to her as long as she could! As soon as she had undressed, she took the child out of his cradle and carried him to her own bed. Little Joe half woke up, and grumbled because he lost the nipple that he kept in his mouth while sleeping. With his two hands he fumbled with Madeleine's breasts. He pushed them with his head, with lips open and desirous.

Madeleine wept no more. She did not go to sleep at once, but lay there thinking of what would happen on the morrow. She felt the warmth of the baby's little moist hands, and of his lips that touched her skin.

(To be continued in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE*)*

IS ROMANCE DEAD?

ROMANCE is dead, the cynics say,
To legendary regions fled
And wrapped in cerements soft and gray—
Romance is dead!

Cupid to other realms has sped,
And realism holds full sway,
With horny hands or hydra head.

And yet as long as earth has May
Youth and his comrade, Love, shall wed,
And thus deny, in radiant way,
Romance is dead!

William Hamilton Hayne

Beyond the Desert

THE STORY OF A STRANGE EXPEDITION INTO THE WILDS OF NORTHERN MEXICO

By William H. Hamby

IT was about eleven o'clock when Sol Miller called my room at the Palm-Tree Hotel. I had been in bed an hour, but so far the mosquitoes had successfully routed every attack of drowsiness.

"Got to make a trip across the San Felipe Desert to-morrow. Want to go?"

"What time do we start?" I replied eagerly.

"Five o'clock."

When I came down next morning at ten minutes to five, the hotel lobby looked gloomily deserted in the dim light. The dining-room doors were not only shut, but had the appearance of being barred. It was too early to eat, but I wanted a cup of coffee. Yet dared not tamper with Sol Miller's punctuality.

Almost immediately he drove up in a big automobile, old, scarred, and disreputable, but it was a car which always came home; and when you come to think of it, that is much more important than paint. The foot-boards were piled high with boxes and bundles, and camp stuff, and cans of water and gasoline. It looked more like a month's camping outfit than a two days' run.

"Hop in," said Miller, his hands on the wheel itching for action.

In the back seat were two other passengers—a man and a woman. There were no introductions or greetings. We were well out of town, and the sun was coming up over the cotton-fields beyond Mexicali, before Sol began to let loose fragments of information.

"Name's Baxter." Sol's head was thrust forward, as he was making speed while the road lasted, and he spoke under the roar of the big car. "He don't talk much, but sort of refers now and then to the middle of South America, or the north of China, or the far end of Africa, as if they were just out behind the barn somewhere. Don't know a thing about him or what he is doing down here, but I got a hunch that he is after a queer bird I took down across the desert about three months ago—a fellow named Madson. He's never come out that anybody knows of."

Sol broke off to swear rhythmically at a Chinaman who had let his irrigation ditch overflow the road.

While he pondered the problem of whether to turn back and go four miles around, or to try to buck the soft, treacherous mud, I glanced over my shoulder in a casual way.

"This your first trip down here?"

It was my first effort at conversation.

"Yes—to this particular spot," replied Baxter in a matter-of-fact tone.

He was about fifty, with light sandy hair, pale blue eyes, and a solid, dogged-looking head. He was tanned so deep that his skin would never come white again, and I noticed he had square, strong hands.

The conversation seemed finished. He did not offer to carry it any further, and I faced about again; but I had got a pretty good glimpse of the young woman with him. I guessed her not over twenty-four or five, and she was interesting—disturbingly so.

I wanted to look back constantly. In that one glimpse I had got the impression that she was not enjoying this trip. Something like a flicker of fear passed over her eyes as she glanced at the man beside her when I spoke to him.

Sol had bucked the soft road after all, and came through none the worse for a few hundred mud spatters. What was a little mud to an old devil ark like that?

"Don't know who she is." He had re-

sumed his snatchy conversation. "Didn't say. Maybe his daughter — maybe his wife—then maybe not. Can't tell."

He gave the old car a whirl across a bridge over the irrigation canal, and we passed out of that rich irrigated strip of ranch land and headed south along a dimly marked road across the desert. To the left rose Black Butte, a dark mass of volcanic rock. Far to the southeast glimmered a serrated range of chocolate-yellow mountains.

I had begun to feel a most unmistakable desire for food. It was nine o'clock, and nothing had been said about breakfast. The sun came down hotter and hotter, and the car bucked harder and harder into that waste space of sand and scattered mesquite and cactus.

Ten o'clock came and still no stop, no suggestion that we should open a box or something and have a sandwich. Twice we halted and passed around the water canteen, while Sol watered his engine. At these times our conversation was of the meagerest.

"How far is it to the Big Pump?" Baxter asked at the last stop.

"About fifteen miles," replied Sol. He took out his watch with his left hand while he screwed on the hot cap of his radiator with his right. "We'll be there at eleven."

"That is where we come to the Colorado River?" the girl asked. She had a clear voice with a soft, rising inflection at the end of the sentence.

"Yes," said Sol; "and it will be the last inhabitated spot we'll see for a hundred miles."

I held out nobly that fifteen miles, for I supposed that we were sure to rest and have lunch at the river. Eleven o'clock might be early for the others, but it was darned late for me.

The old car swung up beside the platform of the store and boarding-shack of the irrigation project. I could smell apple pie from the cook-room.

Sol looked back over his shoulder.

"Shall we stop here for dinner?" he suggested.

Baxter shook his head.

"No, go on!"

And we went on.

Twenty miles farther, where the road turned from the wild hemp, and the cottonwood along the river, Sol Miller brought the car to a stop at the very edge of the waste space and looked around at his passengers.

"This is the last shade for a hundred miles—shall we stop for dinner here?"

Baxter shook his head. "Everything is carefully packed—we will not stop until we get to San Felipe and camp for the night."

"Perhaps," the girl turned to him protestingly, "the other men are hungry."

"Hunger is a mere incident," Baxter spoke impersonally. "Whether a man eats three times in one day or once in three days is a trivial matter."

Something dogged, half angry showed in Sol Miller's lean chin as he thrust his head forward and bore down with his foot on the accelerator. His pride was touched. Sol would die in his seat of hunger and exhaustion before he would again suggest stopping.

"Hunger may be a mere trivial incident," I said to Sol as we hit the dim sand trail across the desert at thirty miles an hour, "but so is death and matrimony and thirst and rattlesnakes. Why in the devil didn't you warn me last night at least to eat breakfast?"

"Forget it," he snapped back at me. "We are headed for San Felipe — it's a hundred and nine miles and no road. With good luck we'll be there by nine o'clock to-night."

II

THE traveler who has not crossed the San Felipe Desert has yet to learn what a desert can really be. The sand, beaten and stripped by centuries of wind, is a dead level, and hard enough to hold up the heaviest car. Far as the eye can reach, and vastly farther, the earth and sky are dead —not a sprig of grass, not a mesquite or a cactus, not a bird or an insect—not a living thing on the earth or in the air.

It never rains. The rim of mountains in the distance are dead as the desert. The sun pours down like melted brass into a vast caldron. At times the wind boils across the face of it, blinding with the dust of fine sand. Then it stills. The desert lies simmeringly before you, and the mirage appears on every hand—grass and trees, lakes cool and beautiful.

In the middle of it a tire blew up. We got out while Miller changed it. Baxter stood looking imperturbably off toward the distant mountain-range south.

"Suppose," the girl asked Sol Miller as he sweated over the tire, "something hap-

pened that you could not fix yourself—what then?"

"A four days' walk to the nearest water—or telephone," he replied jerkily. "Skeletons out there"—he nodded across the desert—"'most anywhere."

She went around to the other side and stood in the shade of the car. I followed her. It was mid-afternoon, and the sun was blistering. She was standing straight, looking out over the glimmering sands to the mirage of a green lake. Her eyes were bright, her nostrils dilating.

"I love that!" she said simply. "This is wonderful! I never was in a real desert before."

Miller was back at the wheel, and I touched her arm in helping her into the seat. You can't explain such things, but somehow just touching her arm that instant stayed with me for hours.

Hour after hour of the most bone-wrecking slamming and banging and bumping, and still no San Felipe, no camp, no food. I was now so hollow, so ravenous, that I just concentrated on holding myself together. Mountains and desert passed, and more mountains and desert—a long strip of glittering salt as we came in sight of the Gulf of California—and then night—stars, and at last a moon.

Then, at nine o'clock, a black mountain of rock at the water's edge, a pass to the right, a broken patch with scattered vegetation, a ramada with three Mexican fishermen, an acrid well, a scrub mesquite big enough for a little shade; and this was San Felipe.

Baxter was the most methodically efficient man I ever saw. He dealt solely in facts, and had his facts all laid out side by side and consecutively numbered.

As the car was disburdened of its camp equipment, he took personal charge of the stuff, and laid it out in perfect order. The tent was to be pitched seven feet to the right of the mesquite-tree, the fire built here, the table set up there. Yes, he carried a folding table, collapsible cooking-utensils, exactly the right number of everything, and provisions nicely calculated for a given time. Just what that time was we were to discover later.

I started in feverishly to help, but every move I made was wrong. Sol Miller tried it, but got in bad with Baxter the first box he opened. It seemed that box was for the day after to-morrow. Even the girl had to abandon her attempt to be femininely useful in the preparations of the supper. We all gave it up. The only thing I really could do satisfactorily was to carry a couple of buckets of water from the acrid well.

It was nine when we arrived. At nine thirty Baxter had every piece of luggage carefully disposed. At ten he had tent stakes set, the tent up, and a model cooking-fire going.

Those who have fasted forty days say the first twenty-four hours are the worst. I can easily believe it. I went off to wait.

The beach was a slope of the purest white sand. The wind from the water was tropically warm. The moon was half up, and the San Felipe Mountains, a pile of black, stood out vividly to the left in the soft light.

On the beach near the edge of the lapping water, the girl stood bareheaded, motionless, gazing seaward.

"Aren't you tired?" I had approached within a few feet of her. "I am. Let us sit down until the supper call."

"Poor man, you must be nearly starved! I am too; but, knowing daddy, I ate an enormous breakfast." She sat down near me and dipped her hand into the warm sand. "You see," she explained, "he is a scientist—several scientists rolled into one—and he simply has to follow his way."

"Scientists are admirable," I remarked; "but I would not voluntarily pick them for hurry-up camp cooks."

She laughed. It was the first time I had heard her laugh.

"Are you going back with the driver to-morrow?" she asked in a tone which I fancied had in it the same lurking fear that I had seen in her eyes.

"Why, I suppose so. Aren't you?"

I had taken it for granted that the whole party would return at the same time.

"No." She shook her head. "Daddy has engaged two Mexicans to bring down pack-mules. They will be here in about five days. Then we are to start out on a quest of a month or so."

"Good Lord! Alone down here?"

She did not say anything.

The tide was coming up. Few bodies of water in the world have more turbulent tides than the Gulf of California. It rises twenty-six feet at San Felipe. It backs water fifty miles up the Colorado River, and one can hear the roar of it for many miles.

There was a hallo from camp. I scrambled to my feet and put out my hand to help her up.

"Supper is ready!"

I was almost running.

"I wish you were going with us," she said as we drew near the camp-fire. "I—I'm just a little bit of a coward. I'll tell you more about it to-morrow."

Supper was all ready. Camp-chairs were pushed up to the little folding-table, knives, forks, spoons, and paper napkins were carefully placed, and there was a tin bowl on each plate. Something was boiling on a suspended kettle. How I hoped it was Irish stew!

It was cove-oyster soup. The one thing in the world that I can't eat is cove oysters. They give me the hives.

That soup and some boiled potatoes formed the supper menu. I ate a lot of potatoes.

After supper I went speedily to the thin, scientific camp bed provided by my host—that is, if Baxter was my host. As the invitation for the trip had come from Miller, and had not been seconded by anybody since, I was not sure just where I stood. That was why I had refrained from asking for any amendment to the supper of cove oysters and potatoes.

But breakfast was better—pancakes and molasses. I made a full meal.

As Sol Miller and I went to the well for water, he remarked:

"We'll go back to-morrow. Start at daylight. The old geezer and the woman."

"His daughter," I corrected sharply.

"All right—his daughter, then," said Sol. "They are going to stay over and wait for some Mexicans and mules and then go prowling around those mountains to the west. Fool trip! But I guessed right—he's after that bird Madson. That's the direction he went."

III

THAT morning I tried to engage Baxter in conversation; but it was an unknown art to him. He could give the most accurate answers of any man I ever saw; but when your question was answered, he was done.

"You have been in South America?" I put out as a starter.

"Yes."

He continued looking at a limb of the mesquite-tree, neither interested nor bored.

"Been up the Orinoco?"

"Yes."

"How far?"

"All the way."

I scratched my jaw and looked around to see if the girl was laughing at us, but she was not. She was watching and listening with intent interest.

"Some fine hardwood along the Orinoco, I've heard," I suggested.

"Forty-six varieties," he replied.

It was the same way about everything. It was not rudeness or incivility that kept him from conversation; but he did not consider it necessary. He had no imagination, and apparently few sensations. He dealt in facts. He had a world thirst for them—exact, scientific facts. If you needed them, you got them, but you had to ask.

The only emotion he ever displayed was when some one questioned, or seemed to question, his facts. Then heat came into his face and a glare into his eyes. I stumbled on this discovery by attempting to argue a point about the Gila monster.

Nor was the girl easily communicative. There was a shyness about her, perhaps born of her long isolation, that made it difficult for her to talk freely at first. In one way, at least, she was very different from her father—she was seethingly alive under the surface, and not at all a worshiper of dry facts.

At sundown we were on the sand watching the light glint along the deep blue swells. No matter how turbulent it may be, a warm sea always seems like a friendly sea to me. It is the cold water that makes me shudder; and the Gulf of California is warm in January as well as in June.

She was bareheaded, and the tropical breath off the sea stirred her hair. She looked fragile in spite of her strength, and this evening she had that troubled look again.

"Miller tells me you are going early in the morning," she said.

It was her first reference since last night to the matter of my going or staying. I had waited for her to bring it up.

"He means he is going," I replied.

She turned and looked at me thoughtfully for a moment.

"You must go, too," she said. "I was foolish last night to ask you to stay. Ours will be a dreadfully long, hard trip—and there is no need."

"Would you mind telling me just where it is you are going—how, and why?"

She frowned and stirred the sand with her right forefinger.

"I don't really know myself. He did not want me to come; but it's—trouble of some sort with a man."

She bit her lip and looked off across the water. The sun was gone, but the light still trailed over the soft, rolling swells.

"It was some man who was with him in South America. There was trouble, dreadful trouble, but I never could find out about it. I have never seen my father so violently upset. He won't mention the man's name, but I have known for a long time that he was hunting for him. There comes a look in his face that frightens me. I don't know what it was that caused the trouble—"

She broke off and frowningly shook her head.

"Only a few times has he shown any interest in women. Still, it might have been a woman."

She was digging her hand nervously into the sand. "Anyway, I'm afraid to let him go alone, for I—just feel it might be murder between them!"

Sol Miller's guess had been right. This matter-of-fact, methodical scientist was after a man—no doubt the man Madson, who had come out these months before.

"It is a fool trip," I said directly. "It's a dangerous trip for anybody; but for you to go alone with your father into these mountains—ten days' journey from civilization—it's criminal! You can't do it, in fact." I broke off. "I'm going with you; but you'll have to fix it with your dad, or tell me how. It is a little awkward, you know."

Her spirits rose instantly. I liked the look she gave me.

"Just tell him"—she was smiling now—"that you are looking for—let's see, what do you know most about?"

"Copper," I replied. "I've some interests of that sort in Arizona."

"Just the thing!" she exclaimed. "Tell him you are hunting for copper and want to go along. He would take anybody anywhere who is really hunting for something. I think that is his religion—to find something that is hard to find."

After supper, while Baxter sat with his back against the mesquite-tree, his knees thrust up in front of him, smoking, I asked:

"Do you suppose there is any copper in those mountains west of us?"

"Don't know."

"I would like to know," I remarked.

I discussed, with what knowledge I had, the possibilities of copper.

"Find out," Baxter said, with the first gleam of real interest I had seen in him.

"I would if I had an outfit."

It was an obvious bid, but I could not help it.

"Go along with me," he said—ungrudgingly, yet not cordially.

"Why, I—I'd be delighted to go!"

He nodded affirmatively. Then, taking his pipe from his mouth, he turned to the girl, who sat with her hands about her knees looking moodily down at the fire.

"You will have to go back with the driver in the morning. I have only provisions for two."

IV

Sol Miller left with the car early next morning, and Eudora Baxter did not go with him. I imagine she had rebelled very few times in her life, but she did it thoroughly this time.

We watched the old car boiling up the sand as it spun through the gap west of the San Felipe Mountains, and then turned and looked into each other's eyes. I was glad I had stayed.

The Mexicans with the pack-mules were due in four days. We waited five, and saw no signs of them.

"I am afraid something has happened to them," said Miss Baxter that evening, after supper. "They may have lost their way, and perhaps are dying of thirst in the desert."

"The accident," I suggested, "is more likely to have happened before they started. They probably remembered they didn't want to come."

"Started two days ahead of us," remarked Baxter, puffing at his pipe.

"Then they are two days overdue," I said.

Baxter nodded, but there was not the remotest sign of uneasiness or impatience in his gesture. As he sat there with his back against the mesquite, his legs crossed in front of him, the flicker of firelight on his intelligent but inexorable face, he seemed to me the incarnation of the force of facts. He had traveled in hundreds of byways that were crooked and dangerous; but I doubted if he had ever felt a thrill, even of danger.

We waited two days more, and the only change I noticed in Baxter was a systematic shortening of our rations; but I was growing increasingly uneasy, and restless. The only way out was back over that desert. To cross it on foot and carry provisions and water enough for seven days!

The three Mexican fishermen gave me some worry. They were three as villainous-looking Yaqui half-breeds as ever I saw—sullen, suspicious, and dangerous. A few months before two American aviators had lost their way and landed with a broken machine on the beach south of here. Later a searching-party found them buried in shallow sand, with their heads crushed.

But the guides and pack-mules straggled in next morning. Baxter had shown no impatience in waiting, but now he fell to breaking camp with a vigor which expressed his haste to be on his search. I wondered if really he was following some thirst for revenge, as his daughter feared.

We started toward the mountains at three o'clock, the mules loaded with the camp outfit, provisions, and water, the three of us and the two Mexicans walking.

During the next five days, as we drove deeper and deeper into those wild unexplored mountains, I learned a new respect for the human frame. I had never before guessed half that it can endure. Eudora Baxter suffered most, of course; but never once did she whimper or ask her father to turn back.

I tried to ease it up for her in every way I could. Twice, when she was about to drop with exhaustion, I made one of the Mexicans carry part of the load, while the girl rode for a time on the mule's back; but Baxter never seemed to notice either his own discomfort or any one else's. He would set out to make such a peak, or crag, or cañon, before camping—and he always made it. While at times I was angry enough to murder him, yet I was forced to admire the tremendous endurance, the nonchalant, absent-minded, unconscious, matter-of-fact fortitude of the man.

Twice we found water to replenish our huge demijohns. Once we encountered human beings—four Mexicans, whose occupation in the mountains was not apparent. These were, if possible, more villainous-looking than the fishermen at San Felipe, or even our guides. For a long time, after we passed them, I made the girl walk behind her father, while I fell behind the pack-mules and kept my hand close to my gun.

That night we found water—blessed fresh water, a whole stream of it, flowing down from a timber-filled gorge in the mountains. Here, too, was the first human habitation we had seen in seven days. A Mexican had a patch of cultivated soil, a cow, and a few chickens and goats.

I overheard Baxter questioning him.

"*Si, si*—an American stayed up in the mountains, came down sometimes—once a month, maybe—and got eggs and frijoles."

When we camped that night and I had gone to bed, I lay on my side for a long time and watched Baxter sitting with his legs crossed in front of him, smoking. I knew he was nearing the end of his quest, and I feared for the man Madson, for there was no mercy in his face.

V

We followed along the course of the stream next morning. The mountains on this side caught some rain, and were covered with live-oak and pine. I kept a close watch for signs of the other white man, and I knew Baxter was doing the same thing.

About four o'clock in the afternoon I saw a path that came down from the woods on the mountainside to the little stream. Baxter stooped and examined it closely as an Indian might. It had been recently used.

Baxter straightened up and turned to the Mexicans.

"Unpack!"

While he was laying out the camp stuff, Eudora watched his careful, methodical movements with terror in her eyes. I knew, in spite of their reticence, that she loved him tremendously; and I also knew that for days she had been foreseeing a mortal combat between him and his enemy.

She turned and went down to the stream for water. The glance over her shoulder was a signal for me to follow.

"Mr. Gordon!" She caught my arm appealingly. "You must not let him get out of your sight. Wherever he goes, follow. That man is near here!"

"But I can't leave you alone."

"Yes," she said, "you must. I'll be all right."

I did not promise, for I had discovered a much greater danger than a fight between her father and his enemy. The four Mexi-

cans we had passed two days ago were following us. I had glimpsed them twice that day, but, not wishing to frighten Eudora, I had kept still about it. I intended to guard her rather than her father.

Immediately after supper Baxter went to his cot, and in thirty minutes he was sleeping soundly. His daughter was sitting on a blanket looking into the fire, her hands locked about her knees, her head bent forward. She was dead tired.

"Go to bed," I urged. "You are all fagged out."

She put up her hand and pushed the hair from her forehead.

"What are we going to do?" She looked up at me, her large brown eyes swimming with troubled tears. "I just can't figure it out. When he starts on a thing, I don't believe anything in the world could stop him—and they will meet to-morrow!"

"I don't know." I sat down near her—near enough to touch her if I should reach out my hand. I wanted to slip my arm around her protectingly, but did not. "If we only knew what the quarrel was about, we might have something to work on."

"But we don't. I can't get a word from him. When I even mention Madson, he just shuts his jaw hard and thrusts his head forward, and that awful look comes into his eyes. I know one of them will be killed when they meet—and I believe we are within a mile of Madson's camp!"

"I'll do my best to keep them apart," I said.

Somehow I did not fully trust the girl's judgment of her father. I did not believe they at all understood each other; and yet I, too, had seen that set, grimly ferocious look in Baxter's face for days. It might be a murderous feud between the two men; but, even as I promised, I could think of no way of turning Baxter aside from his vengeance.

We both threw up our heads with a start, and listened. There were footsteps on the path above. We sat motionless, staring into the shadows beyond the firelight. The steps came nearer—heavy, deliberate steps that scuffed the gravel in the path.

A man emerged into the firelight—a big man, bareheaded, with bushy hair and heavy beard. He was dressed in heavy trousers and a woolen shirt open at the throat; but around his waist was a brilliant silk sash. He looked like a sort of cross between *Robinson Crusoe* and De Soto.

"Good evening," I said, feeling relief that at least he was a white man.

"Good evening," he repeated with a rumble.

He approached the fire and stood looking down at the girl and me. Neither of us had stirred. His eyes were almost hidden under shaggy brows. I heard a sharp indrawn breath from the girl, saw her hands clutching the skirt at her knees, and knew this was the man she feared.

I never was more nonplused for words; and I feared to speak at all, lest the conversation awaken Baxter. The man carried an innocent wooden water-pail in his left hand, but had a long, heavy revolver sagging at his belt.

He had never seen the girl or me before, and unless Baxter roused up he would probably take us for some sort of adventurers, and pass on after water, for which he had obviously come.

"Hunters?" he asked.

"For copper," I replied as briefly.

"None here. Some iron, signs of lead, a little silver, and traces of gold, but no copper."

"Thanks," I replied. "It will save me the trouble of investigating."

I wanted to get rid of him quick. The strain on the girl was terrific.

He turned and stalked on down to the stream, filled his bucket, and went thumping back up the path.

I turned to Eudora. She was almost ready to collapse, and I put my hand on her arm. In spite of her fright, she smiled.

"Isn't he odd? It would be dreadful for daddy to kill him!"

"Go to bed," I ordered peremptorily. "I'll watch for a while."

I waited nearly an hour, and then, to be sure she was asleep, tiptoed over to the door of her tent and listened. She was sleeping soundly.

I ripped off the end of a blanket, tied strips around my shoes, saw that both my revolvers were in good working order, and slipped off down the back trail.

Two miles from camp I got a glimpse of a fire in a thicket of chaparral on the other side of the cañon. This was what I was looking for. From the brightness of the fire I knew that the Mexicans had very recently made camp, and were probably cooking their supper.

I crossed over to the other side of the little stream and slipped toward the light.

I wanted to learn just what those cutthroats were after.

There were four of them. They were broiling a rabbit, or some sort of game, over the fire, and were gesticulating and talking loudly. I easily slipped within thirty steps of the fire, and with my indifferent understanding of Spanish I soon picked up the thread of their talk. They were a villainous lot, and I have never heard, even in Mexico, anything quite so obscene as their sallies at each other.

I lost their drift for a moment. Then I knew they were talking about our party—what they were going to do, and how they would do it. Sweat and chills seemed to pass over me at the same time, as I listened to their diabolical plot. I drew a gun and aimed it carefully at the one who seemed to be the leader.

No, that would not do. I could not kill all of them. One or more would be sure to get away; and an American who shoots a Mexican two hundred miles south of the border, even in self-defense—

It would not do at all—not with Eudora Baxter in my keeping.

I waited until they settled down to sleep—there would be no attack on our party to-night—and then I slipped away.

VI

It was eleven o'clock when I got back to camp. At two I roused up Baxter. If he had a murderer's conscience, it did not interfere with his sleep. I almost had to wreck his cot before I could arouse him.

"What's the matter? What do you want?" he grumbled, as he finally sat up.

"It's two o'clock," I said, far from amiably, "and I want you to stay on guard the rest of the night. I need a little sleep."

"Stay on guard?" He was awake now. "Ridiculous!"

"A gang of Mexican bandits have trailed us for two days. They are within two miles of here now."

"My dear sir!" Baxter shook his head. "I have been followed by bandits all over the world, and not one of them ever got more than fifty dollars from me."

"These," I retorted, with a rush of anger at the utter selfishness of his mental habit, "are after much more than fifty dollars!"

"But I haven't twenty," he replied, yawning.

"But you have a daughter." I put a sting into that—or tried to.

"She's all right," he said, stretching out to lie down again. "She grew up among Mexicans in Arizona. She can manage them."

"But see here, Baxter!" I spoke roughly. "Don't be a damned fool! These men are worse than savages. They are renegade half-breeds—without fear of punishment in this wilderness. They are after your camp outfit—and your daughter!"

Baxter shook his head again.

"I never pay any attention to the natives. Let them alone, and they won't bother you."

Already he had stretched out and was pulling the blanket back over him.

I thought there really was no special danger that night. Unless cornered, a Mexican will usually put off even murder until to-morrow.

I spread a blanket on the ground in front of the girl's tent, and lay down, intending merely to rest while I watched; but when I awoke the sun was shining, and Eudora was bending over me, desperately shaking me by the shoulder.

"Oh, hurry, hurry! He has gone!"

I was on my feet in a moment.

"You come along, too," I said.

"No, no!" She was urging wildly. "You must hurry! Run! One of them will be killed!"

"I won't leave you."

"Oh, please, please!" she begged. "I'll follow—I'll come after you as fast as I can—but don't wait!"

On that promise I started up that path at a speed that would have wrecked the lungs of most men; but I was used to mountains.

Every minute I expected to overtake Baxter, but I must have climbed three miles, and still did not come upon him. I began to grow uneasy about leaving the girl so far behind; and yet, if I returned without him, and anything happened, she would never get over it.

Presently I came upon a rude shack in a clump of pine, and heard angry voices beyond. The two enemies had already met!

Gathering the remnants of my strength, I sprinted forward to prevent murder. I dashed around the corner of the cabin, pulled up suddenly, and stood staring. Just beyond were Baxter and the big, hairy Madson, denouncing each other in the most violent language as they sat side by side on a log!

They did not see me, and Baxter went on waving his forefinger violently under the other's nose.

"But I tell you, Madson, your article in the *Geographic* was absolutely unscientific. The roots of the ipecac, or ipecacuanha, are little larger than a knitting-needle, and often run straight down for eighteen or nineteen inches. Your whole article tended to discredit my explorations along the Yapura, and I demand that you make a retraction!"

Good Lord! That was what I had come to prevent! I almost collapsed in my tracks.

At that I thought of the girl and her danger, and wrath flamed up. I whipped out a gun, leveled it at the two, and called sternly:

"Hands up!"

They faced about, mildly annoyed at the interruption, and obediently lifted their hands.

"Quick!" I ordered. "If you have any guns, get them and come running! Those Mexican bandits have captured Baxter's daughter!"

I had no scruples over unscientific statements if they would get action.

I went back down the trail like a mountain goat, the two scientists trailing after me at a creditable speed; but even as they trotted I could hear them arguing about the ipecac plant and the Yapura River.

A pistol shot two hundred yards down the mountainside cracked the stillness of the morning. Terror went through me like a knife. They were attacking her now! I leaped fifteen feet down a bank, staggered up, and plunged through the chaparral in the direction of the shot.

I saw her standing huddled behind a clump of bushes, and life came back to me.

"Eudora!" I called, as I ran down to her. "Are you hurt?"

She shook her head, but pointed below.

"They are there." She still held the revolver in her hand. "I saw them slipping after me. I was frightened, and fired to scare them."

She was trembling as I laid my hand on her arm.

"Let's get back to the path," I said. "It is the only way down."

"Oh, did you find him?"

"Oh, yes, I found him!" Disgust was in my tone. "He and Madson were quarreling over the length of ipecac root."

"Was that it?" She gasped—and then, in spite of our danger, began to laugh. "Shall I ever learn any sense about daddy?" she said. "I might have known it was something like that!"

We got back to the patch above where the Mexicans were lurking, and waited for Baxter and Madson.

"Ah!" Baxter looked at me, annoyed and amazed. "Your statement, I think, young man, was that they had captured my daughter!"

"They had," I said severely, "and had started to torture her; but I shot the leader one-thirteenth of an inch west of the center of his clavicle, and he let go. Now get this," I added sternly. "We are in the worst danger of our lives. There is about one chance in three of our getting out of it. I am in charge from now on; and if you silly scientists don't obey my orders, you'll be shot by a white man instead of a Mexican!"

Either the Mexicans were frightened off by Eudora's pistol shot or they decided that the hairy Madson was too strong a reenforcement, for they did not molest us on the way back to camp. They had looted our supplies, however — our guides being conveniently absent at the time.

We got what food Madson had at his cabin, packed up, and headed down the cañon, all four of us carrying our guns ready for immediate action. We camped that night in an open stretch two or three miles wide, and I ordered the scientists to take turn about standing guard.

Madson proposed that he should turn back here.

"No!" I said. "You have got to see us safely out of here."

"But, my dear sir"—he looked at me in amazement—"I had nothing to do with your coming. I am investigating—"

"It doesn't make a darned bit of difference what you are investigating," I declared vehemently. "We've got to get this girl out of here, and that quick. You and Baxter can come back and argue to Doomsday after we get to San Felipe!"

We reached San Felipe; but we lived on fish for three days until Sol Miller arrived. I had left orders with him to come back in two weeks, and every seven days thereafter until we returned.

I still bossed the expedition, for it was my hired machine this time. I made Baxter sit with the driver, while I sat in the

back seat with Eudora. Madson, who had decided to go back with us, was assigned to the extra seat beside the luggage, in the center of the tonneau.

When we came in sight of Calexico and the American line, Eudora broke into a laugh that was almost hysterical with relief.

"My, but I'm glad to get back!" she said. "But"—and her eyes were bright—"I'm glad I went!"

When the machine pulled up at the Palm-Tree Hotel, Baxter was the first out. As I alighted, he put out his hand to me in a purely formal good-by, and remarked in his matter-of-fact tone:

"Young man, I am considerably indebted to you for your company on this trip. I hope we may run across each other again some day."

"We shall," I said, turning to smile at Eudora, who stood at my shoulder. "We shall meet every time you come to visit your daughter. She is going to be in my care from now on, for I can't trust her to you. We are to be married in just an hour and a quarter."

And as we turned into the hotel we heard Madson repeat:

"Quite a violent young man!"

"A little precipitate," agreed Baxter, but with a sigh of relief. "It is probably for the best, though. It will relieve me greatly, for it takes so much of my time looking after her!"

An Interesting Couple

CONTAINING A USEFUL HINT UPON THE SECRET OF SOCIAL AND BUSINESS ADVANCEMENT

By Garret Smith

"AREN'T they an interesting couple?" whispered timid little Mrs. Bristol to her husband, as they followed the impressive David Harkness and his strikingly dressed wife into the glittering café.

"They are indeed," agreed John Bristol mildly.

Mildness was John's chief characteristic; but now, in half-conscious emulation of his male companion, he tried to square his own solidly built but desk-bent shoulders and to walk with a little of the Harkness aggressiveness. No one would call him and Molly an interesting couple, he thought wistfully. For once John Bristol pined to be interesting instead of unimaginatively useful, as he had been for the last thirty years or more.

As far as the superficially physical was concerned, the two couples were not unlike. Both women were petite and dark, both men fair and amply built; but there ended the resemblance. The Bristol couple were outfitted in the mode of a Brooklyn department-store; the Harkness raiment bespoke Paris modistes and London tailors.

In the subtle aura of personality emanating from the two wedded pairs there was an even more striking contrast. The Bristols shrank into the café; the Harknesses burst in. Had John Bristol piloted his spouse into this uncharted sea without convoy, they would have drifted about helpless for a while, looking timidly at the table they would have liked, until some captain of waiters shooed them contemptuously into the most undesirable corner of the room and left them to be insulted by one of his pirate crew.

Not so Harkness. He looked blandly over the head of a mere captain, summoned the head waiter with an imperious gesture, told him where he would sit, and sat there, being served subsequently with gusto and obsequiousness under the personal direction of the captain and an occasional anxious glance from the chief himself.

There are two kinds of passengers on the great accommodation train of life—those who fear the conductor and those who make the conductor fear them; those who stand in awe of waiters, traffic officers, chauffeurs,

subway guards, floor-walkers, and attendants in public libraries, and those who fill the souls of such functionaries with wholesome awe; in a word, the Bristols and the Harknesses.

Bristol was head of a department in a big wholesale grocery house in Manhattan, and looked it. He and his wife were plain Main Street Americans. Mr. and Mrs. Harkness were to all appearances citizens of the world at large, he being a native of England, she of France, but both having about them an atmosphere of many climes. The Bristols had not yet made out what Harkness's present occupation was. He talked in large terms of many callings in widely scattered regions, and Bristol conjectured that he might be some sort of promoter.

The acquaintance between the couples was a new one. That spring the Bristols, seeking a little more pretentious setting, had moved from a two-family house in Bay Ridge to an onyx-front elevator apartment in a new district of Flatbush. A month later there had appeared signs of life in the hitherto empty apartment across the hall. The Bristols had at once been impressed with the appearance of their new neighbors. They had exchanged affable nods, then a casual word of greeting, as they passed from time to time in the hall.

This evening the Bristols had started forth on one of their rare orgies of dining out at a restaurant. Just outside their door they met the Harknesses, also outward bound.

"Ah, good evening!" effervesced Mrs. Harkness. "We see you togethaire at last. I tell my hosband the other night how fortunate eet is we have such nize neighbors. You mus' call on us soon, I hope, now we are more settle."

"You must indeed," seconded Harkness. "We are complete strangers in New York, and we welcome new friends. We're just over from Egypt, where I've had a deal on for the last year; but most of our friends are in England and France—my birthplace and Mrs. Harkness's, though we haven't lived in either country for years."

"We'll be very glad to call," murmured Bristol.

"Yes, indeed," agreed Mrs. Bristol. "I'm glad you settled in Flatbush. It isn't very stylish, but I hope you'll like it."

"Perhaps we'll stop in on our way back this evening, if you are going to be in," ventured Bristol. "We were just going out to get something to eat at a restaurant around the corner."

"Ah, you dine out too?" exclaimed Harkness. "So do we. We should be very happy to make it a party. Won't you join us? That will give us an opportunity to get acquainted."

"Ah, deelightful!" chimed in Mrs. Harkness. "We will make eet a party!"

Bristol and his wife looked at each other doubtfully. Somehow this impressive couple did not belong in the cheap little eating-house to which they were headed; but how could one refuse?

"Sure, we'll be glad to," Bristol agreed. "Won't we, Molly?"

"Certainly," she assented.

"Now I tell you what," Harkness went on, as they stepped into the elevator. "You come with us. I know a better place than the one you speak of. We were going to go to Manhattan and make an evening of it."

Mr. and Mrs. Bristol shrank within themselves. Both had the same queries and misgivings in mind. Were these strangers asking them to dine at their expense? The Bristols could hardly consent to that. On the other hand, if they were to pay their half of the check for an evening at a New York lobster palace, it would be an unheard of extravagance.

But again, how refuse graciously after consenting to the party? They were too proud to admit that they couldn't afford the expense. These people seemed worth cultivating, too. They mustn't offend them. So, without looking squarely at his wife, Bristol consented.

"That is, if you don't mind being out a little later than we planned, my dear," he added apologetically.

He had his week's salary in his pocket, but it hurt him to think of making a serious inroad in it for mere food. They had planned on a two-dollar limit for the evening; but the personality of the Harknesses was infectious, and Bristol felt an emotion of daring elation. Hang it all, they were entitled to a little fling once in a while! He'd get along better if he made more acquaintances, and here was a man worth cultivating.

The Bristols forgot their qualms under the spell of their companions' conversation. It alternated between flattering questions as to the social and commercial features of

New York life and tales of experiences around the shores of the seven seas, with hints at acquaintanceship with men and women of importance the world over.

The dinner was a revelation and an event to the Bristols. Harkness had seen to that. He had politely asked his new friends for their preferences, but had not waited for their hesitating replies. He had gone ahead and ordered a quantity and variety of food that made the Main Street pair gasp; but the joy of consumption, seasoned with the steady flow of interesting talk, mitigated the dread of the reckoning.

When the check was finally presented, both men reached for their money. Naturally, the waiter had handed the document to Harkness.

"How much is my half of the damage?" asked Bristol, with a breezy attempt at nonchalance.

"The total is fifteen forty," replied Harkness. "Seventeen will cover it, with a proper tip to the waiter. By Jove, old man, have you anywhere near even change for that? I've got nothing smaller than a hundred-dollar bill. I hate to have a lot of small bills foisted on me in change. If you can make it nearer, I'll settle with you afterwards. Better still, as we're going to be doing this again soon, you pay this check and I'll be host at another party in a day or two. Is that agreeable?"

Bristol felt rather sick within himself, and out of the corner of his eye he could see Molly paling; but, hang it all, he'd got to be a sport. This man was one, and he mustn't look cheap. He declared that the suggestion was quite agreeable, and paid the check.

Also they rode home in a taxicab at the suggestion of Harkness and at the expense of Bristol.

"An' now won't you come in an' see our new leetle nes' for a minute before you retire?" invited Mrs. Harkness, as they reached the apartment-house.

What the Bristols saw was a place that made them as much dissatisfied with their own Main Street apartment as had their friends' conversation with their own experience in life. They contrasted the tasteful period furniture with their own gaudy, overstuffed things, the monotoned wall-paper with the flower-spangled walls of their apartment, the narrow-framed prints with their gilt-incased chromos. They were so oppressed by a superiority which they only vaguely understood that they made their call a brief one; but before they departed they invited their hosts to drop in on them the following evening.

"Certainly a most interesting couple!" Bristol commented when they were alone. "Molly, we've been living too long with our noses to the grindstone, and not making any worth-while acquaintances. We've got to shake ourselves up a little."

"You don't know anything about these people, John," she suggested. "They may be mere adventurers. We'd better go slow. I didn't like his letting you pay the whole bill to-night."

"Oh, sure! We won't commit ourselves; but they're interesting and stimulating, just the same. To-night was worth the price. We ought to meet more people like that. Do you know, I was thinking that if these people turn out to be all right, and worth cultivating, we haven't any proper social connections to introduce them to. Morrison, of our company, offered a while ago to put us up for the South Brooklyn Social Club. I didn't think much of it at the time, but I believe it would be a good move. Several of the officers of the company who live out this way are members, and there are a lot of other influential business men in it. They have nice dances and receptions, and you'd enjoy it."

"But, dear," Mrs. Bristol demurred, "you'd have to have a dress suit, and I'd have to have an evening gown."

"Well, we ought to have them," her husband insisted. "We've got to get into the social swim a little. It's poor economy not to do it."

So, after a long debate, it was decided on. The next day Bristol asked Morrison to put them up for the club, and steps were taken toward the procuring of the dress suit and the evening gown.

II

FOLLOWING their little impromptu party, the Bristols and the Harknesses were constantly together. The more the former saw of the newcomers the more they were fascinated, and the more they longed to move in the rarified atmosphere with which their new friends were so familiar.

They soon forgot their fears that they might be dealing with a couple of adventurers. From time to time Harkness showed Bristol letters from various parts of the world that seemed to confirm the

stories he told. The plain Americans had become completely hypnotized by the globe-trotters.

To be sure, little Mrs. Bristol had temporary misgivings as to their friends' financial solidity when an instalment collector from a Manhattan furniture house called at her flat by mistake, and made it plain that he wanted the Harknesses. She noted more than once that bill-collectors seemed to haunt the door across the hall.

She mentioned these phenomena to her husband.

"That's nothing against them," he countered a little irritably. "Harkness admits he went pretty near broke in his Egyptian venture, but he'll strike something good here before long and get on his feet again. It's no disgrace to buy things on credit. I've been thinking that we could make a better appearance if we weren't so afraid of getting anything on time. We need some different furniture badly."

But the expression on his usually meek wife's face warned him that he had followed that line far enough.

Mrs. Harkness was spending the afternoon with Mrs. Bristol when the new dress suit arrived from the tailor. The hostess could not refrain from mentioning what the package contained.

"That's verra nize!" commented her guest. "A man mus' have ze right garments if he would make good appearance. My hosband great believer in good dressing for to make business."

Molly Bristol wondered briefly if Mr. Harkness had a dress suit, but dismissed the doubt as ridiculous.

A few days later, however, her momentary doubt was justified. Harkness dropped in one evening, and made it clear that he was out to get an ax ground.

"See here, old man," he began. "I'm going to ask a favor of you that you'll think no end brazen. We're invited out to an affair on Saturday night that absolutely requires evening clothes. My dress suit was worn out before I left Egypt, and I gave the confounded thing away. I've written my London tailor to make me another, but it 'll be weeks before it arrives here. I'm wondering if it would be quite beyond the pale if I asked you to loan me yours for the evening!"

Bristol was distressed. That new suit was very dear to him, both sentimentally and financially. Moreover, he had not yet worn it out of the house himself. Its first official appearance was to be a week from Saturday night, at the June dance and reception of the South Brooklyn Social Club, of which the Bristols had now been duly elected members. To allow another man to initiate the gorgeous garment was like allowing a perfect stranger to carry one's first-born to the baptismal font.

But there it was again. Bristol had never in his life looked into a compelling pair of eyes and said "No!" He could as easily have used violent profanity in the presence of his sainted grandmother; so he meekly handed over the suit, and listened as meekly, later, to a gentle upbraiding from his wife.

"I couldn't very well refuse him, and have him mortally offended," he protested. "I'm glad of the chance to do a man like that a favor. He's certainly shown us a lot of attention, and so has his wife. You must admit we can't be the most interesting people in the world to persons of their sort."

"I don't notice that they are in any hurry to invite us to that return café party he talked about when we paid the bill for the other dinner!"

"Well, it's never seemed convenient. Harkness has spoken about it a number of times."

"You may be right, my dear. I admit, as I have said before, that they are a very interesting couple."

The Bristols saw nothing of their neighbors on the Sunday following the premature début of the dress suit. Apparently they slept late after their evening out, and when they did arise it was to go out somewhere for the rest of the day and evening. The borrowed raiment was not returned that day; nor was there any sign of its reappearance during the fore part of the week.

On Monday morning Bristol had a long talk with the borrower on a subway train, but no mention was made of wearing-apparel, or of any subject that approached it embarrassingly. The lender presently found his mind completely diverted from the matter. Harkness was full of projects which—so he would have his hearer believe—might redound to the benefit of them both.

"In any event I'm bound to strike something good," he concluded, after outlining several good openings in a business way, from which it seemed he had but to pick

according to his liking. "When I make up my mind which I'll take, I'm going to make it worth your while to come with me."

He made it sound convincing in the extreme. How, let me ask you, could any one under such circumstances think about a mere delay in the return of a borrowed suit? And if Bristol had thought about it, would it be worth while to risk offending a possible benefactor by mentioning such unworthy thoughts?

I should say not, indeed! And he told Mrs. Bristol so with some loftiness of expression when she touched on the subject that evening.

III

On Wednesday afternoon Mrs. Harkness dropped in for a call on Mrs. Bristol. Even then the two ladies dexterously glided around the topic without a collision for the best part of an hour.

"Oh, you should have seen my Daveed in your hosband's evening clothes Saturday night," the Frenchwoman gushed suddenly. "He look vera grand! They fit him so well after I have made by ze tailor ze alterations."

"Alterations!" gasped Mrs. Bristol.

"Yes. He try them on ze day before, and I fin' ze sleeves too short a little; so I have ze tailor let them down."

"John can't wear the suit again, then!" was jolted out of the unhappy wife of the suit's owner before she could check herself. Then she blushed at her rudeness.

"Oh, but to be sure! When Daveed have done with the suit, I have ze tailor put back ze sleeves where they were, and you will never know. One theeng more I want to ask you. Saturday night we are invite to a beeg partee, an' I say to Daveed you won' mind if he keep ze suit till after then. Mr. Bristol, he never hardly goes out in the evening to require it, an' it will be vera great accommodation to us. Ze trousers I notice Saturday also are too short, so I take them back to the tailor this morning for him to let down like ze sleeves. I have them both put back after. Ze tailor vera busy this week, but he promise have ze trousers let down by Saturday afternoon. You don't min'?"

Molly Bristol wanted to shriek that she did mind. She saw the little social triumph she and John had planned tumbling in ruins about her; but timidity in the presence of Mrs. Harkness restrained her until self-interest came also to her aid. After all, perhaps this magnetic woman's husband would be able to help John to a better position in the business world. What did a little delay and disappointment in beginning their social career matter in comparison? Besides, the suit was at the tailor's now, and it was too late to retract.

"I don't suppose John will mind," she managed to falter.

"Zank you so much!" smiled her guest; and as if she had attained what she came for, she took her departure.

Even John Bristol's patient submission was taxed when his wife reported to him that evening.

"That certainly is cheek!" he grunted. "You should have said we had an engagement for that evening that we couldn't break."

"Would you have said that, John Bristol?" she demanded with unwonted spirit. "You are always expecting me to do disagreeable things that you haven't nerve to do yourself!"

"There, there, little girl!" he soothed her. "I don't suppose I would. That's the trouble with me—I haven't the nerve to face anybody down. If I could take a lesson from this pair, and follow their example in getting what I wanted, it would be worth the price of a good many dress suits. Probably you were right, though. They would have thought we didn't want to lend the thing any longer, and were making an excuse; and there's an off chance that Harkness may make good and land me something better than I have now."

But the Bristols were not to give up their party, after all. When he told Morrison the next day to cancel their reservations, saying that his dress suit was at the tailor's, and would not be back in time, Morrison scouted the excuse.

"Come along just the same," he said. "A lot of the fellows dress informally this time of year. It's the last party of the spring season, and if you and Mrs. Bristol don't go it will set you back till fall. Come even if you only stay a little while and don't dance."

So, with many misgivings, they finally decided to go. They went, and for the first hour they were miserable. All the early arrivals among the men were in evening clothes or dinner coats. Bristol's business suit, he felt, stood out like a white presiding elder at a negro camp-meeting. He

pressed himself as far back against the wall as possible in the most obscure corner of the room.

Then, just before the dancing began, an apparition loomed up suddenly as if it had emerged through the center of the floor, fixed Bristol with a glittering eye, and came straight toward him. It was Harkness, strutting proudly in Bristol's dress suit, which, thanks to the tailor's work, fitted him like a glove, and looked a thousand times better than it did on Bristol's flabby, stooping figure!

IV

"WHY, hello, old chap!" the exalted one exclaimed, gripping Bristol's hand as if he were a long-lost brother. "Why didn't you tell me you were due here to-night? We might have come together."

"Why—why, you see," stammered Bristol, "I'm only a new member here, and as long as I couldn't feel free to invite you I rather hated to mention it. You didn't tell me you were coming."

"No," the other laughed, "and for much the same reason. I'm not even a member, and I thought it would be indelicate to mention the fact that I had been invited here by a new acquaintance when you had been left out. But there's no harm done. I've been meeting a lot of interesting people in the last hour, out in the men's dressing-room. Come along! I want you to meet them, too. Let me find Mrs. Harkness first, and ask her to look up Mrs. Bristol."

Bristol straightway found himself in the limelight reflected from the glittering personality of Harkness. The latter was the center of attention wherever he went.

The Englishman had indeed met an amazing number of people already. Anybody who looked good to him he managed to meet; and to them all he introduced his friend Bristol with suave gusto.

Meanwhile Mrs. Bristol was being put through the same process by Mrs. Harkness. As a coming-out party it was vastly more of a success for the new members than they had hoped. It turned out that there were, as predicted, enough men there in business clothes to prevent Bristol from continuing to feel uncomfortable, and his resentment toward Harkness gradually died.

The most interesting event of the evening was his introduction to Rufus Colby, general manager of the Great Eastern Grocery Company, the chief rival of the Manhattan Produce Company, which employed Bristol. After Harkness had introduced Bristol as an authority on the grocery business, the three men had a long talk. To be sure Harkness, as usual, led the conversation, posing as an authority in the same line, and using a patter of facts which he had picked up from Bristol himself in previous talks.

"I'm inviting Mr. and Mrs. Colby over to dinner at our place in the near future," Harkness said, as they were parting for the night. "We want you and Mrs. Bristol to join us then."

"Well, Molly!" Bristol commented to his wife, as they conducted a post-mortem of the party after they reached home. "I've got to admit that my dress suit did me more good on Harkness than it would have on me. I could never in the world have strutted around as he did, and made myself known to everybody!"

But days followed the party in swift procession, and the dress suit did not return to its owner. Once only did Harkness mention it—a week later, when they met in the hall.

"By Jove, old man, I meant to get that suit back to you before this!" he exclaimed. "I asked Mrs. Harkness to get it to the tailor, but there has been so much going on that she has overlooked it. We'll attend to it at once. I knew you were in no hurry for it, anyhow. You seldom dress for the evening."

Bristol was constrained to say that he was indeed in no hurry.

At the end of another week Mr. and Mrs. Bristol held a council of war. They decided that they had been a pair of worms long enough. They were now about to turn. After much wifely scourging, Bristol braced himself, took a deep breath, cleared his throat, and immediately after dinner presented himself at the Harkness apartment, prepared to demand gently but firmly that the dress suit be returned that very evening by bearer.

"I won't trouble you any longer about the alterations. I'll gladly attend to them myself," he was going to say.

But, alas, Harkness himself opened the door to him, and the wind of resolution went out of him.

Harkness was again arrayed in the borrowed dress suit.

"Come in, old man!" he said heartily, before Bristol could speak. "We were just coming over."

Bristol was hopelessly embarrassed. He tried his best to look at Harkness without seeing the dress suit, much as the Japanese are said to regard the nude. He looked him desperately in the eye, but, try as he might, his glance would stray down the satin lapels accusingly. Harkness, however, seemed to be absolutely unconscious of his raiment.

"We were just coming over to invite you and Mrs. Bristol over to dinner to-morrow evening," Harkness was running on. "The Colbys are to be here, you know."

Bristol reclaimed a breath of courage at that, along with a sudden inspiration.

"Thanks very much," he said. "I'll ask Molly. I don't think she has any engagement. Evening dress all around, I suppose?"

And he looked squarely and consciously, now, at the dress suit.

"Oh, no—not at all necessary! I know how uncomfortable you feel in toggery. I told Colby it would be a purely informal affair."

Nevertheless, on the morrow evening, when the Bristols arrived, they found their host again in Bristol's dress suit and the other male guest in a dinner coat.

"I knew you wouldn't mind my dressing," Harkness apologized. "Perfectly all right for the host, you know. I slipped this on in a hurry after Colby came and I found he had on a dinner coat!"

V

THE dinner-party had still another and greater surprise in store. After dinner the men retired to Harkness's den and talked business.

"I have been looking you gentlemen up pretty carefully," Colby announced, after some preliminaries. "Mr. Harkness has convinced me that he is the man I'm looking for, and he has also convinced me that you are the second man I want. I'm giving up the general managership of our company to become its president, and I have decided to put Mr. Harkness in my old position and to make you his assistant, at his urgent request."

He named a salary for Bristol that was so much larger than what he had been getting that it left no room for indecision. Bristol accepted on the spot.

"There, now! What did I tell you?" he exclaimed triumphantly to Molly, when they were at home again. "Did it pay not to make a fuss about the dress suit, or didn't it? I told you Harkness could do me more good wearing that suit than I could. I have simply ridden to glory clutching the tail of the coat hung from Harkness's shoulders!" Then his expression changed. "Why couldn't I have been the kind of man who could ride his own dress suit to glory?" he asked.

"Well, you have your chance yet, dear," soothed Molly. "We must try to make ourselves interesting to people, the way the Harknesses do. They win because they are an interesting couple. We've got to learn from them and do likewise."

"Well, if you mean being interesting in a social way, I'll have to get another dress suit. It's a cinch I'll never dare ask Harkness for this one now that he's my boss, and it's equally a cinch he'll never give it back. He seems to think it's his now. As a matter of fact, he's earned it; so let it go at that!"

And it proved even so. The subject of the mooted garment was never even hinted at again between the owner and the wearer.

Harkness made constant and unembarrassed use of it now. He conceived his new job to be mainly a diplomatic one. He spent every evening dining the trade, or attending meetings of one kind and another, and always in Bristol's dress suit.

Bristol, on the other hand, soon found that he would have had no time to wear his dress suit had it been in his possession. He had to work early and late to keep up with his new job. There were countless details to attend to, and he had much to learn; but, spurred by the determination to make good and to keep the additional income he was getting, he worked as he had never worked before in his life.

As time went on, however, the strain of overwork and of responsibility without authority began to tell on him. Presently there was another reason why his dress suit would have been no use to him. He was getting so thin that it would have flapped ridiculously on his person. Finally the situation got on his nerves.

"Molly," he announced one night, "I have come to realize that I have been made a goat. I thought I was riding to glory on the tail of a dress suit, and I find I have merely been hidden behind the aforesaid

tails. I am working myself to death without any recognition. Harkness is getting all the glory. He's getting to be a bigger and bigger man every day, while I'm getting to be more and more of an overworked packhorse. By the time I'm dead or scrapped, he'll be president of the company, and he'll owe his start to my dress suit, which I didn't have the ability to wear to advantage. He's a dress-suit gentleman and I'm an office-coat guy, and that's all there is to it. I'm going back to my old job with the old company just as quick as I can get there!"

Something of all this he said to President Colby the next afternoon, as he handed in his resignation.

"Now just a minute, Mr. Bristol," said Colby, when he ran out of words. "You don't want to be so confoundedly humble. It may surprise you to know that I'm going to let Harkness go at the end of the month."

Bristol could only stare in amazement.

"Let him go!" he stammered finally. "Why?"

"Too much dress suit," replied Colby. "His idea of his job," the president went on, after letting this sink in, "is to be a giddy entertainer. We don't need that. We want somebody for general manager who understands the business thoroughly, and who can do the real work of managing. We've got that man, so we are about to say good-by to the interesting and sociable Mr. Harkness."

"Who is the man to succeed him?" Bristol asked, with merely perfunctory interest, for it didn't matter one way or the other to him now.

"His name is John Bristol, a trained grocery expert who has been doing the real work of the job for the last six months, and doing it well, and who, thank the Lord, wouldn't know a dress suit if he saw one!"

Bristol went home in a daze. When he fully realized what had happened, he was torn between elation and dread of meeting the crushed Harkness, who after all had been a pretty good friend to him. After he had talked it all over with Molly, he finally plucked up courage to go in and condole with the dethroned one.

To his relief and surprise, Harkness met him at the door with a broad grin on his face.

"Come in, old top!" he shouted. "I was just coming over to see you. We're leaving to-night for Honduras. Got a cable this afternoon about a wonderful oil prospect I'm going to look into, so I've resigned from the company. We've sold all our furniture and so forth back to the concern we bought it of, so we've nothing to move but our trunks. By the way, I want to leave you something to remember me by. I'll have no use for it down in that rough country. I had it laid out to bring over. May need a little alteration for you, but take it and wear it with my blessing!"

And with an elaborate bow he handed Bristol his long-lost dress suit.

IN OCTOBER

DEAR heart, another year of love
For thee and me!
Ah, say the summer hath not passed
For me and thee!
The south wind sang an amorous tune,
And wondrous sweet in leafy June
Were thrush's note and rose's boon
To thee and me!

The thrush is gone—no more he sings
For thee and me;
To sunnier lands his way he wings
From me and thee.
The forest boughs are bare and gray,
But true love cannot pass away
With thrush's note and June's array
From thee and me!

K. Dolores Dempsey

Too Long and Too Loose

HOW MARCEL MARCEAU'S TROUSERS PLAYED THEIR PART IN THE HISTORY OF FRENCH ART

By Ellis Parker Butler

I REMEMBER the case of Marcel Marceau. His case illustrates what I am trying to say, which is that a man's love for a woman often leads that man, even if by unexpected roads, to greater success than he had ever believed himself capable of.

I knew Marcel Marceau well. His studio was at No. 47 *bis,* Rue Boissonade—Paris, of course—and I suppose he sometimes paid his rent, although I cannot imagine how he ever raised the necessary francs. He never had any money, and he was always in debt to the whole Latin Quarter.

In those days, when I used to look from my window at No. 23 and see him slouching up the quiet little *impasse* with a long loaf under his arm and a milk-bottle protruding from his pocket, I felt sorry for him, for he seemed to be one of those innumerable artists destined to lifelong obscurity and cold-in-the-head misery. His long hair and unkempt beard, his slouchy gait and stooped shoulders, and, more than all, his cheap and ill-fitting garments suggested present and unending failure.

I remember especially his trousers, huge at the hips, the fringed ends of the legs slopping in the wet, their corduroy texture stained and faded. I remember, too, one night at the Café du Dome, when Marceau was sitting at a table beside Marguérite Breuque, and Holloway, the American, at the next table, propounded that ancient riddle, making it apply to Marceau.

" Why are Marceau's trousers like two cities in the south of France?" he asked, and gave, himself, the inevitable answer: " Because they are Toulon and Toulouse " —which you may think witty if you know that Toulon is pronounced " too long," but not otherwise.

Marceau had enough English to understand. Marguérite understood, too, and laughed in a way to make Marceau redden with annoyance. He said something under his breath in French, and Marguérite responded. I did not catch what either said, but Marceau cursed, threw his glass across the room in sudden anger, and arose. He struck at Marguérite with a backhanded slap, but she ducked her head. When he had slouched out of the café, she laughed and sidled over beside Holloway.

" *Poof,* he is a jealous pig! I like you better," she said to Holloway, or words to that effect.

Holloway put his arm around her, and thenceforth they were good friends.

At that time Holloway had hooked on to the kite of the Emotionalists—the group of young artists who were carrying Paris by storm—and was considered the best of the lot. The dealers were taking up the Emotionalists and selling their work. The public had progressed from saying, " They daub, but it doesn't mean anything," to " They mean something, but it is hard to know what they mean," and from that to " They are elemental, but they are big; they have the first big, new thing in art since Velasquez."

The Emotionalists did have something—they had an idea. They took a canvas and brushes and plenty of paint, and tried to put an emotion on canvas before the emotion changed. It meant rapid work and broad work—ridges of paint, wads of it, and not much drawing or composition; but their color was fresh and interesting, and a number of worth-while critics saw something in it.

Holloway was sincere. He believed in emotionalism, and he did it so well that he passed Schwerdfeger and Couss just as they

had passed Drouet, who was the originator of the whole thing. He went them all one better in crudity, and was looked upon as the great exponent of emotionalism and the master.

Holloway had innumerable imitators, and old Hirsch, the dealer, sold his things by the dozen. The canvases, as was inevitable, were classed as "emotions," "moods," "reactions," and so on. Drouet had called his pictures "emotions," and Schwerdfeger and Couss called theirs "moods." Holloway called his "reactions"—"Reaction to Mood" was one, "Reaction to Beauty" was another.

Holloway, while flirting as young men in Paris do, had never made real love to any girl there, but after that night at the Café du Dome he set out to win Marguérite from Marceau. I think Marguérite told him some things Marceau had said about Holloway and the whole emotional business, and he was trying to hurt Marceau in the only way he could hurt him—by stealing his sweetheart.

Art, in Paris, is one-third paint and two-thirds jealousy. The art crowd lives art, which means they talk it in and out of season, and they cannot talk without slam-banging the other fellow. The knife is always out, and those of one school never stop carving those of the opposed school except when they are too busy carving those of their own school.

Marceau had the misfortune to be a mediocre painter, and, what was much worse, to be of the school of Meissonier, painting with finicky care and finish. Holloway, whose work looked as if it had been done with a broom, used to scoff that Marceau painted with a single hair. He said that Marguérite Breuque's hair was finer than that of any other girl in Paris, and that Marceau clung to her so that he might be sure of a supply of superfine hairs. It maddened Marceau; he could never take a joke.

The studios of the two men, opposite on a narrow hall, were certainly as contrasted as possible. Holloway's had the huge palets of his school, rough-grained canvases, extra large tubes of colors, a punching-bag, Indian clubs, dumb-bells, boxing-gloves. You can picture him from this. He was a hulking, noisy, red-cheeked fellow.

"Big!" he used to bellow. "Big stuff! Big emotions! That's why I knock 'em all—I've got the big emotions and I can paint 'em. These cold fried Frenchies emoshe like frozen old maids. When I emoshe, I get punch into it!"

When he thought he was not getting the real emotion into a picture he used to lift up a heel and kick a hole in the canvas. His studio was always whanging with noise. When he wanted to put an easel aside, he put his foot against it and sent it skidding.

Marceau, sloughing around his place in his thin-soled, worn-out French shoes, made no more noise than a cat. He would stick his nose into a canvas and dibble at it with his tiny brush more carefully than a dentist fishes for a nerve. He did landscapes—"The Fog" and "Fields at Twilight"—and old Hirsch once told him the only thing he did well was his cow.

This cow of Marceau's was an obsession, in a way. He always put a cow in his landscapes, and the cow was always half a mile away, or about that. It was so far away that it was represented by a spot hardly bigger than a speck of white and two specks of brown.

"Your cows—yes, admirable!" Hirsch said to him one day. "Your landscapes—no, detestable!"

"What is your meaning, M. Hirsch?" asked Marceau.

Hirsch dug his magnifying-glass out of his pocket and showed Marceau the cow through it. Under the glass the cow was three blobs of paint—one white and two brown.

"Splendid broadness!" said Hirsch. "Big! Tre-mendous! If you paint all as you paint a cow, M. Marceau, you become the emperor of the Emotionalists!"

"Fiddlesticks!" said Marceau.

Just the same he went back to the studio and tried it, for he was no fool, and he coveted success as much as the next man; but he made nothing of it. His brush could not paint broadly. His paint lay flat and glossy. He gave it up.

Marguérite, after that joke about Marceau's trousers, deserted him rather cruelly. She still came to No. 47 *bis*, Rue Boissonade, but when she had climbed the stairs she turned to the door on the right, which was Holloway's door, instead of opening the door on the left, which was Marceau's door. When he met her, as he did now and then, she flicked her thumb-nail against her white teeth, which is the uttermost insult.

Poor Marceau was in misery. He loved the girl. When a Frenchman really loves,

he loves tremendously—he is crazy with love. Marceau was that way. He would have murdered Holloway if he had known how; but, lacking that, he thought much of murdering Marguérite and then murdering himself. Once, when he was coming from his studio and Marguérite was about to open Holloway's door, going in, he took her by the throat and would have had her strangled, but Holloway came out and hit him in the eye, knocking him half-way down the stairs.

For a week that eye was our joy at the Café du Dome. We crowed that Marceau had joined the Emotionalists, and was carrying his masterpiece with him.

"It's not his—it's mine!" Holloway boomed. "I'm using him for a canvas now, but I don't like him—he's too fine-grained for big work. That thing I painted on his eye ain't broad; the color is fine, but the ensemble is too smooth!"

Marguérite, oddly enough — or perhaps not oddly at all—seemed to like Marceau a little better because he had tried to murder her. As nearly as I could understand her jargon, she said he was not such a limp rag after all. It sounds more interesting in French, more like the American "not such a damp dish-rag after all."

"If he had croaked me, I could have loved him," she said; "but he has no pep. Look at his art!"

II

Now and then, when I dropped into Marceau's studio, he turned the canvas on which he was working, so that I could not see it. I think he was ashamed of what he was trying, but he was burning up with a fevered desire to be great—to be greater than Holloway at Holloway's own game. He was struggling with Emotionalist art of the broadly painted sort, and he was doing another thing.

He asked me one day if I knew *la boxe Américaine*, or something of the sort; and when he showed me a shop-new pair of boxing-gloves I knew what was in his mind. He wanted to learn how to punch Holloway's head.

Grainby, who had a studio on the same floor, said that Marceau used to throw the furniture around and yell at the top of his voice, like an Indian. He persuaded Grainby to put on the gloves with him.

"You see the underneathness of that sofa?" Grainby asked me one day. "I call that Marceau's cozy corner, I've knocked him under there so often. I want you to see him box me some day, and then you can go home and write a story that will make a world laugh. He puts on the gloves and holds his hands out in front of him, like—well, like a waiter holding a tray. I make a feint at him, and he pushes both hands out. I poke in between them and knock him under the sofa. Then we do it again."

I did not happen to see the exhibition until a month or two later, and then it was not quite as bad as Grainby had said. Marceau had learned what he considered footwork by then, and he danced around like a chicken on a hot stove. Grainby talked to me while he fought, and smoked a cigarette. Once in a while Marceau would cake-walk up to Grainby, and Grainby would swing one arm, hit him on the side of the head, send him chicken-stepping away, and keep right on talking to me. I remember he took out one of these patent cigar-lighters, snapped it, and lighted his cigarette, while he was biffing Marceau with his left.

It did not look then as if Marceau would ever be a match for Jess Willard. I'll let you in on a secret—he never did get to be.

I dropped in on Marceau one day and found him with his face in his hands, weeping. On the floor at his feet lay a canvas. He had put his heel through it—in imitation of Holloway, I suppose. I stooped and picked it up.

He had used the coarsest canvas he could find—a sort of burlap—and he had painted as broadly as he could; but still the thing looked smooth. The color was muddy, too, as it so often gets when a man has worked over a thing too long. It was hopeless, and Marceau knew it. I said something which I meant to be sympathetic.

"Ah, no!" he said. "It is all of a uselessness. How is it your American poet says it—'Art is long and time fleets'? Yes, like my trousers, that is art—Toulon and Toulouse. No good!"

There was something supremely pathetic in the way poor Marceau tried to make a jest of his misery.

"I am complete—satisfied—finished!" he said. "I have try. I give up, now. Marguérite, she is gone from me; my art, she is not so much as to look like thirty cents. I am a waste. Yes, I shall throw myself away like a wet dish-rag!"

He jumped up suddenly, listening. I heard, too, a light foot climbing the stairs, and I recognized a little half cough that Marguérite affected. I am ashamed to say I deserted Marceau, but I was very uncomfortable there with him, with my limited French and his great sorrow.

I went across the hall. Holloway greeted me with his genial roar. He had eight or ten canvases set on easels and elsewhere. Hirsch was coming up to have a look at them.

"Best lot I've turned out!" bragged Holloway. "These will make the old blood-sucker's eyes bulge. Mag, stew up a brew of tea for my distinguished guests!"

She went into the space behind the curtain to do this, and at that moment Marceau threw open the hall door and stood in the doorway. I saw at a glance that he was beside himself with a desire for murder. He wore his boxing-gloves, but in his right hand he held an Indian club that would have felled an ox. He said something in French, so rapidly that I could not catch it, and leaped at Holloway, raising the club high above his head.

Holloway happened to turn—I think I shouted a warning—and he jumped aside, and the club missed him entirely. Before Marceau could recover, Holloway had him by the throat, wagging him back and forth like some sort of boy scout signal, and slapping the poor fellow on the cheek each time with the flat of his hand.

"You want fight, do you? You want fight? You want fight, do you? You want fight?" he kept repeating at each slap. "You'll get it here!"

Marguérite came running from behind the curtain and stopped short. She screamed and put her hands before her face, but I have a notion that she spread her fingers enough to see between them.

Holloway released Marceau and laughed. He reached for his own boxing-gloves and drew them on. Poor Marceau was feeling his neck with one thumb.

"Tie these," Holloway ordered me. "I'm going to give this lad what he wants. Want fight, do you?"

He walked up to Marceau and hit him in the chest. It was a sort of under-hand, upward blow, and Holloway must have put his weight behind it, for Marceau seemed to rise and fly backward, slightly doubled up. He hit a wooden chair that was standing sidewise, and on which Holloway had left his enormous palet, with its great masses of freshly untubed color.

The chair went over, and Marceau with it. He lay sprawling on his face, and did not move; and the next moment Marguérite was kneeling by him, lifting his head and saying words of love.

I think Holloway had made a great tactical error. He should not have hit Marceau with a boxing-glove. In the French mind the boxing-glove plus an American typifies brutality. He should have kicked Marceau, or hit him with a vase, or stabbed him. That boxing-glove blow alienated any affection Marguérite may have had for Holloway.

Marceau presently struggled to his knees, and Marguérite's first act of helpfulness was to peel the huge palet from the seat of his trousers, where it was glued by the colors. She threw it aside with disgust and glared at Holloway. She said several choice things to him, too, for Holloway was laughing uproariously; but suddenly he grew angry.

Marceau had got to his feet and was passing Holloway just then, and Holloway turned and kicked him. He kicked him twice, fair and square, in the seat of his Toulon and Toulouse trousers, and sent him sprawling into the hall; but it was too late for a kick to win back Marguérite's admiration. She spat at Holloway and rushed out of the studio.

I went also, for I was much afraid Marceau might have been severely injured. He was weeping tears of mortification, and I patted him on the back in a silly sort of way. I think I wanted him to believe that all Americans were not like Holloway. I told Marguérite to go to the corner pharmacy—the one on the Boulevard Raspail—and get arnica or a liniment. She hurried away, and I made Marceau pull off his trousers and other garments and get into a robe and into bed.

He was there, behind the curtain all those fellows use as a partition, when Marguérite returned, and Hirsch was with her.

III

THE girl left Hirsch in the studio while she brought the arnica to me.

"Did you tell Hirsch?" I asked.

"Do you think I am a fool?" she hissed. "I told him nothing. He would enter—how could I stop him?"

"Then you go out and talk to him while

I give Marceau a rub," I said, and she went.

I knew Holloway would not brag of mistreating a skinny Frenchman as he had mistreated Marceau. It was nothing to be proud of. I uncorked the bottle and began to rub the poor fellow.

"Marvelous! Superb! Tremendous!" I heard the fat dealer exclaiming in the studio. "Such color! Such breadth! A masterpiece!"

That was too much for me. I went to the curtain and looked out.

Hirsch was standing before the chair over which I had draped Marceau's trousers, paint side out. He had his hands cupped and was looking through them, standing away and coming closer.

"Tremendous! A masterpiece! A genius!" he ejaculated.

I walked over to where he stood and tilted my head to one side.

"You like it?" I asked.

"*Monsieur,*" said Hirsch, "I am looking upon the most wonderful work the Emotionalist school has yet produced!"

Marguérite looked up at me, and I winked and put my finger to my lips.

"The idea is revolutionary," said Hirsch. "It is what we—what all of us—have been feeling for but never quite finding—the perfect color on the perfect surface. The splendid roughness of the *toile*"—that means fabric—"combined with the noble breadth of handling! This Marceau is a genius! You will believe me, *monsieur,* if I say your Marceau is the master of all painters?"

"Oh, I knew that!" I said carelessly.

"Corduroy!" exclaimed Hirsch. "None but a genius would think of corduroy!"

"Well, I'm sorry to have to spoil such a pretty story," I said; "but I'm afraid I'll have to. The truth is that I don't think Marceau meant to discover a new *toile.* He used corduroy simply because he had to. Poverty!"

Hirsch looked at me and fairly gasped with joy. He knew the advertising value of things.

"You mean—" he said.

"Just that! Starving here, with not a cent to buy canvas and the great, newfound Emotionalist talent burning within him. What could he do? What would a great artist do? He used the only *toile* he had. He used, *monsieur,* the seat of his trousers!"

"A true artist would," said Hirsch with something like awe. "But, nevertheless, *monsieur,* he has discovered the true *toile* for the Emotionalist painter—rough and yet gentle, impressionistic and yet sympathetic. And the color! The composition! Ah!"

He bent closer to examine the composition and the color.

"Marvelous!" he exclaimed. "Here and here and here"—pointing out the gobs of paint where the palet had clung to Marceau—"is genius, *monsieur,* but it is broad brushwork such as we know. Others might do this. Holloway, working on such a *toile,* might do it; but here and here—"

He indicated with his hand the two broad, multicolored slashes where Holloway's foot had met the corduroy as he kicked Marceau to the door.

"Yes, here and here is more than genius. Here and here, *monsieur,* is the evidence of mastership! The rest others might have done, but this even Holloway could not have done."

He looked at the daub a bit longer.

"Twenty thousand francs!" he said suddenly. "I will give twenty thousand francs for it, just as it is, legs and all. I will give five thousand francs for each work of art equal to this that M. Marceau can produce."

From the room behind the curtain came Marceau's voice, triumphant and clear.

"Attention, Hirsch! Is it a contract? I would come out and converse, but I have no trousers."

"Trousers or no trousers, it is a contract. For twenty done on corduroy I will give you one hundred thousand francs."

"*Bien!*" said Marceau. "It is a bargain! And ten thousand for what you are looking at?"

"Agreed, Marceau," said Hirsch. "Done! Concluded! And I ask but one question, Marceau—what is the name you wish given to this splendid creation?"

There was a silence behind the curtain for a moment or two. Then came the voice of Marceau again.

"I call that creation 'A Fond Heart Feeling the Thrill of Love,' *monsieur,*" he said.

As I said in the beginning, a man's love for a woman often leads that man, even if by unexpected roads, to greater success than any of which he ever believed himself capable.

Once in a Lifetime

TELLING OF DORIS'S WONDERFUL ADVENTURE IN THE LAND OF MAKE-BELIEVE

By Elmer Brown Mason

THE road of experience leads straight away from the land of make-believe. Some of us never go back to it. Some of us go back so often that we become confused and think we are living in one land when all the while we are really living in another; but to a few of us it is given, just once in a lifetime, to go back to the land of make-believe.

"Is my mo-tor waitin'?" Doris asked, in tones weary with boredom. "I act'lly believe my er-mine coat's draggin' on the sloppy pavement!" she added, hunching up one shoulder a little, and throwing back her head the better to gaze over it.

The mirror did not answer. It gave back, however, the image of a small, piquant face with a pert, tip-tilted nose, cheeks and lips redder than nature had intended, but delicious, even beneath their rouge, with the delicacy that is the prerogative of youth. It showed, also, a slenderly molded bust and thin shoulders covered by a plain black dress set off with white cuffs and collar, and topped by a white cap—the sedate uniform of a theater usher.

The watcher—had there been a watcher—would never have looked at the dress; his attention would have been held by that sensitive, dreamy face.

Doris gave one last shrug into the mirror. Then she sat down on the bed, removed her cap, and slipped out of the black uniform and into a less sober frock. Meanwhile her mind was busy, her thoughts were bright gulls skimming the sparkling waters of imagination. She could *see* herself robed in ermine, waiting for the dove-colored motor, *feel* herself wealthy, beautiful, of the world's elect.

The cap replaced by a small hat of the season's shade of red, she picked up her gloves and went down the two flights of stairs to the street. A man in a fawn-colored overcoat was waiting for her.

"'Lo, Harry! How did it work out?"

"'Lo, honey! Say, it worked just fine. We had twenty-five per cent more'n we had last Monday."

"Gee, that's fine!" the girl exclaimed. "How much did the postals cost, Harry?"

"Sent out three hundred this time. The printin'—mim'graphin' they call it—an' everythin' come to ten dollars."

"Gee, I'm glad!" said the girl, looking at him with friendly eyes.

"Yep," he went on enthusiastically, "the little old picture-the'ter's lookin' up! I'd ought to average ninety a week now. An' say, girly, I thought we'd kind o' cel'brate to-night—cut out the chop-suey joint an' go to some real swell place."

"It's half past 'leven," the girl objected; but her eyes sparkled.

"Just the time for us s'ciety people to begin eatin'," the man responded. "Where shall it be?"

"I'll tell you where," the girl answered, her eyes pools of light, her cheeks pink with excitement; and she named a restaurant famous in the night life of New York.

The man whistled, then looked at her curiously.

"I'll say you're some little picker!" he exclaimed. "Let's go!"

Harry Armstrong was the manager of one of the lesser moving-picture houses, in which he had a small interest. Doris had met him as informally as many people meet in New York. He was a lonely boy cut off from other boys by his hours of labor, just as she was denied normal relations with her fellow beings because she must usher at the theater when the rest of the world was playing.

They liked each other at once; in a short time they frankly loved each other. Each night, after their respective theaters had closed, they met and dined frugally; the man obviously proud of the girl's fragile beauty, the girl happy in the dependability of her lover.

All was going well when, without warning, the receipts from Armstrong's theater began to fall off. The Monday night performances were the reason. The Star had what is known as a neighborhood audience, and that audience seemed to prefer to stay at home the night after Sunday's gaieties. The solution was easy, once hit upon, however. A specially good feature was put on for Monday night only, and post-cards announcing it were sent to a list of regular patrons.

Doris was very happy. She glanced around the brilliantly lighted restaurant and imagined herself a favored guest who dined there every night. She admired the quiet way in which Harry gave his order for two club sandwiches, just as if they were surfeited with richer food at home. That was much sweller than if he had ordered an expensive meal. The people at other tables were the kind that interested her—the kind she would like to know, so she told herself.

A large man entered the room, followed by two women and another man. The head waiter bowed grandly to them.

"That's Mr. Williams, the manager of my the'ter," the girl whispered, leaning over the table to her lover. "He knows everybody. I'll bet them people with him is somebodies!"

"That's a swell dame—an' gee, what a coat!" Harry answered.

Doris's eyes grew dark with admiration as she looked. The woman's face was high-bred, sparkling, alive, but with just a trace of discontent. It was not at the face that Doris gazed, however—it was at the wrap; and it was worthy of her look, of any one's look!

Hundreds of little animals had died to make that sable wrap. It flowed from the woman's bare shoulders down to the hem of her gown, a beautiful thing, a thing nearly priceless, as the world puts a value on what women delight to wear.

"Harry," Doris said breathlessly, leaning well over the table, "that's the kind o' wrap I've always dreamed of—though I kind o' thought of er-mine first. I've pretended I owned one like that, that I was beautiful like she is; but most I've pretended I owned that kind o' wrap."

"Be-lieve me, she ain't got nothin' on you," the man said loyally.

Doris gave him a grateful glance.

"That woman's perfectly happy, Harry," she went on. "She's got everythin' she wants in this little old world. The man next to her's her husband; he's awful rich, gives her everythin' she wants, an' lets her do whatever she pleases. She buys a new dress or some diamonds every week, an' she goes to pick 'em out in a dove-colored automobile."

"You got a swell imagination, girly!" the man answered, a little pucker of discomfort between his eyes.

"Hush!" she warned him. "They're goin' to sit at the next table."

Mr. Williams pulled out a chair for the woman in the sable wrap, and she smiled her thanks up at him as she let her furs slip carelessly to the back of the chair.

"You do dance beautifully, and the setting is more than original," Williams said, evidently continuing a conversation.

"Yes, isn't it?" the husband agreed. "I don't know any professional who dances so well."

"Sometimes I think I'm hopelessly mediocre, nothing but a society amateur," the woman answered, her lips tightening in lines of discontent.

"You're quite wrong," the manager hastened to contradict her. "I know no professional who dances better, few who dance as well. Your setting is gorgeous—it would make a sensation before the public."

"And to think I shall never know whether you are only being kind, or whether the public would really care for me!" the woman said lightly; but the lines around her mouth tightened.

"Why don't you let them see it?" Williams asked.

"How I would love to!" the woman sighed. "But you know it's impossible. I'm quite sure Payne wouldn't like it."

"I sha'n't mind a particle, my dear, if you wish to try it," the husband lied unconvincingly.

The woman smiled at both the men, but she shook her head.

"I know how you dislike publicity, Payne," she said.

"But why have publicity?" the manager insisted. "Go on under an assumed

name, or with no name, and with a disguising make-up. I should be glad to put you on. There's too long an intermission between my second and third act. You'd fit in there beautifully."

"I'd love to, but I really don't think it would be wise," the woman responded, sighing regretfully.

The other woman across the table leaned forward and said something that Doris could not catch. Williams looked up and caught the girl's eye. Her face was vaguely familiar to him, and it was a pretty one. Anyway, in his profession it was best to be on the safe side. He bowed.

Doris nodded her head with just the proper shade of cordiality, then turned her flushed face to her lover. The check had been laid before him, face downward, and he was placing a five-dollar bill upon it without turning it over. The waiter made change.

They rose and swept out of the restaurant, Harry carrying her shabby coat over his arm. The girl was glowing; it had been simply perfect.

"Harry," she whispered, as he helped her into her coat outside, "would you mind walkin' along the automobiles for a minute? I just know there's a dove-colored one, an' it's hers."

"Sure thing, girly!" he answered, puzzled, taking her arm.

Half a block farther down there *was* a dove-colored car—an enormous, luxurious car with a stolid Briton in dignified slumber in the chauffeur's seat.

"There it is," Doris said, in the same hushed tone with which a young curate announces the offertory.

"You're sure right!" Harry agreed. "It's what I should call kind o' mouse-color, though."

The street was dark, and there were no passers-by. Doris turned and kissed him.

II

It was a realist, not a dreamer, who first painted a lily, boiled a peach, trimmed a tree. It is realists, not dreamers, who start wars, get divorces, make themselves unhappy by always striving for something higher. The dreamer is content; he draws his joy not from the world, but from within. Dreamers are satisfied with their place in life. They do not see its beauty through the mist of striving that veils all beauty from the realist.

Doris was happy in her work. Of course it was hard to get people seated; but once the bulk of the audience had arrived and the curtain was up, the theater changed to fairy-land. Doris had never seen fairy-land any more than she had seen fireflies, but she always thought of the tiny lights from the ushers' torches as fireflies, and drew satisfaction from the comparison.

Then, between the acts, there were beautiful women to look at in the boxes, and perhaps a marvelous fur wrap. The girl longed to feel the luxury of such a garment over her young shoulders; but she consoled herself with the dream that some day, somehow, that pleasure would be hers. And every evening she played the game of pretending before her mirror.

It was a week from the supper in the uptown restaurant, and the lights had gone up for the long intermission between the second and third acts. Doris had just brought a glass of water to a girl in E, and had been rewarded by a scornful glance at her uniform, when something drew her eyes to the left stage box.

There could be no question about it—that was the same woman, and the same wrap—the woman who had supped at the next table a week before. The girl hurried up the aisle and spoke to another usher.

"Deary, d'ye know who that dame is in the box? See, where old Williams is comin' in now."

"Sure! Everybody knows her," the usher answered contemptuously. "Where you been livin', kid? That's Mrs. Payne Collier. Ain't that a swell wrap? Cost twelve thousand dollars, I been told."

"Sure it is!" Doris sighed. "Sure, sure it is!"

Again she hungrily watched the woman and the wrap during the short intermission between the third and last acts. Then she slipped out of the theater and looked over the waiting cars. It was there, the dove-colored one, the same chauffeur slumbering with the same dignity in front.

"Whatcha think, Harry, whatcha think?" she greeted her lover breathlessly on the boarding-house steps.

"I think you're the prettiest kid in little old Manhattan," he answered without hesitation. "But—well, what's all the shootin' 'bout?"

The girl gave him a grateful glance for the compliment.

"You know that gor-geous coat we seen

last Monday?" she went on. "Well, it was there to-night. Her name's Mrs. Payne Collier."

"You don't say!" he answered. "Funny name for a coat, ain't it?" he continued with heavy masculine humor.

"It cost twelve thousand dollars," the girl went on, ignoring his words. "Oh, Harry, to have one of them things on just once, just once!"

In the little chop-suey restaurant the man drew out her chair—a trick he had learned from the theater-manager—before he answered.

"I cert'nly wish I could get you one, honey! I can get you 'bout everythin' else in reason. My salary's raised thirty more a week."

Doris came back from a dream of entering the dove-colored car and saying: "Home, James!"

"Gee, but that's fine, Harry! Why, that's—that's fine!"

"It ain't the half of it, girly. My dividends are goin' to be bigger'n I thought possible. Looks as if I'd have 'bout a thousand bucks in the little old savin's-bank!"

"Well! Well!" Doris gasped, overcome by the vision of such wealth—she visualized it in terms of fifty-cent pieces.

The man across the table watched her silently, and gulped before he spoke again.

"I can't buy you no sable coats, Doris, but I could fit up a mighty pretty little flat," he said.

Doris stared at him wide-eyed as his meaning dawned on her. Her lips were dry, her heart was beating hard.

"Meanin'—meanin' we get married?" she asked, more to gain time than anything else.

"Yes," he answered. Then, as it were in reply to the expression in her eyes, he added: "Why—why, don't you love me, girly?"

"Why, yes—yes, of course I love you. I—I love you more'n anythin' in the world, but— Oh, Harry, I can't make you understand!" she finished, nearly in a wail. "I love you, but I ain't ready yet!"

"No, I don't quite get you," the boy answered, after a pause; "but since you ain't throwin' me down, or nothin' like that, I s'pose it's all right."

"I will marry you, dear," the girl said earnestly, leaning over the table. "I will—I've always meant to; but I can't yet—I can't! It's somethin' I want, an' I don't know what it is. You don't think I'm unreasonable, do you, dear?"

"I think you're the finest little girl on this earth," he answered stoutly. "An' if you ain't quite ready yet—well, I'll wait till you are!"

III

It is the dreamers' blessing to make the world beautiful for themselves with the gilding of imagination; the dreamers' curse to see clearly into the grief of others and to bleed for them.

Doris wept that night in her little hall bedroom—wept because she could not at once yield to her lover's wishes; but even as the tears fell she knew, just *knew*, that it was impossible for her to marry him then. Also she saw clearly that her unexplained refusal hurt him. She felt it even through the loyalty of his words.

She loved him more than ever, but the barrier was still there—she *could not* marry him at once. In vain she tried to analyze it away, and told herself truthfully that there was no *real* reason for keeping him waiting. Perhaps it was because dreamers have little to do with real reason; perhaps—but who shall say?

For a week the girl was unhappy.

Monday night came again, and Doris rather welcomed the time when she would have to work, and could forget her troubles. Once the play had started, she knew she would sit silent in the darkness and dream nebulous dreams—dreams which had no definite object, but which made her happy. Then there would be the long intermission, during which she could watch some beautiful woman and try to visualize her daily life, or could pretend that the wrap flung carelessly over the front of the box was to rest on her own slender shoulders after the play was over.

The audience once seated, she slipped into a vacant seat in the last row and leaned back. There was an unusual number of "standees" behind her, however, and their whispers disturbed her. She got up and went out into the foyer, where she caught bits of their conversation. With the thrill of excitement that mystery brings, she realized that they were reporters—not critics, who converse in bored monosyllables, but real reporters—and there were a lot of them.

Perhaps something was going to happen. But nothing did happen, and her thoughts

veered back suddenly to Harry, and became unhappy again.

The first act had gone by, and the curtain was sinking for the second. The girl moved to the head of the aisle—her post during the long intermission. Then the lights were suddenly darkened again, and the curtain rose on a back scene of barbaric gold. Those who had left their seats paused, uncertain.

From each side of the stage came a small negro dressed in green and silver and carrying on long perches rows of green and red parrots. The perches were set to the right and left, and the negroes disappeared, to return immediately with other perches, this time clustered with gorgeous tropic birds—red macaws, sulfur-crested cockatoos, and great toucans with their enormous variegated bills. Hardly were these set beside the others when the lights were further dimmed, the orchestra wailed out a savage melody, and, so quickly that Doris hardly realized its coming, the figure of a woman held the center of the stage.

Her face was half veiled by the feathers of her head-dress; her slender body was clothed in ostrich plumes. For a moment she poised there, light as sunlight, then melted into the sway of the music. It was a picture, a harmony, more than a dance. She seemed to float to the high notes, to sink into slower motion with the low, like music embodied; and then she was gone.

Doris rubbed her eyes during the storm of applause, then rubbed them again. A voice beside her spoke excitedly.

"No question about it, old man — it's the Payne Collier woman! The tip was straight. Her gray car is outside, too."

"You're right," agreed another reporter. "That is, I'd swear you're right; but I sha'n't dare write it unless I see her close by and am quite sure. We'll wait at the stage door till she comes out, if she takes all night to do it!"

The lights came on again as the feather-clad dancer bowed her acknowledgments. Once more she was gone; nor could prolonged applause bring her back.

Doris was thinking fast. The reporters had all disappeared from the theater. No doubt they were waiting outside. What was it Mrs. Payne Collier had said that had to do with reporters? Oh, yes—publicity! She disliked the idea of publicity.

A daring thought came to the girl. She would go and warn her.

Laughter and voices came from the star's dressing-room, back of the stage. Doris paused and listened. The voice of the star carried to her.

"You're the hit of to-night, Mrs. Collier! I'm glad you're not a professional, and aren't coming on again!"

"It's dear of you to say it," answered a woman's voice. "They did like me, didn't they? I've wanted to find out all my life if I could dance, and now I know. It's delightful!"

"You were marvelous," the theater-manager said.

"It was perfect," the woman continued; "and I'm going to escape scot-free, too. I'm sure there wasn't a reporter there!"

"But there was — lots of 'em — an' they're waitin' outside to see if it's really you!"

Doris did not know how she had entered the dressing-room, and hardly recognized her own voice.

The two women and the two men turned and stared at the slender girl in the black usher's dress, whose eyes were blazing with excitement. Mrs. Collier broke the silence.

"It was very kind of you to come and warn me," she said. "How very pretty you are, my dear!" she added impulsively.

"Rather a nuisance, but I suppose we'll have to bear with it," her husband remarked in annoyed tones.

"I'm sorry, Payne." Mrs. Collier turned toward him. "It would be fun to fool them!" she went on, her eyes sparkling. "I think it can be done. Yes, I know it can be done!"

"How?" the man asked; but she left his question unanswered.

"Come here, my dear!" she said to Doris, rising to her feet. "I know you won't mind helping me. Take my wrap, put this mantilla over your head, and go straight out of the stage door. My car is directly outside. Let the men waiting catch a glimpse of your face; then get into the car. After you've gone a little way, speak to John through the tube, and tell him where you want to go. I'll take a taxi home and send to you for my wrap in the morning."

As in a dream, Doris felt the warm folds of the sable wrap close around her shoulders, and realized that a mantilla was being tied loosely about her head. Then she was walking out of the stage door. A voice detained her.

"This is Mrs. Payne Collier, is it not?"

She pulled aside the lace over her face and gazed straight at the man who had spoken.

"It is *not!*" he said, in answer to his own question, and stepped back.

Doris swept on to the dove-colored car; the chauffeur reached back and opened the door. For a moment she hesitated; then, hunching up one shoulder a little, and throwing back her head the better to gaze over it, she said aloud in tones weary with boredom:

"I act'lly believe my er-mine coat's draggin' on the sloppy pavement!"

In her own room Doris did not even glance at the mirror. Laying the sable wrap carefully on the far side of the bed, she undressed quickly and slipped between the covers, snuggling both her hands into the soft fur outside. There was a humming in her ears in the darkness. She told herself that it was the wings of the angels of happiness that surrounded her.

For a long time she lay living over her moment of triumph, living over the feel of that wrap upon her shoulders—the wrap which she knew was real, since her hands were touching it even then.

Suddenly she realized that something still better had happened to her—something far above even a priceless sable wrap. What was it?

Ah, that was it—yes, that was it! The barrier was gone. She was going to marry Harry. She was going to marry Harry the moment he pleased!

A MEMORY OF SUMMER

Little river, what are you singing
  Over and over,
Day out, day in,
So sweet, so sweet, and always just the same?
Surely it is her name,
  And you too love her.

I wander by your side
  As once we wandered
In golden summer-tide,
  And gaily squandered
The laughing hours
  That now are gone,
With all those summer flowers
  White in the sun—
Yet not so white as she,
  As, 'mid your boulders,
With moon-white breast and knee
  And Dian's shoulders,
A dryad from the tree,
  The wood-god's daughter,
She hid herself from me
  In your wild water.

Young moon that walks the shallows,
  A maid adream,
Even as you, she hallows
  This little stream.
'Tis hers forever,
  And her name the song
The singing river
  Hath on its tongue!

R. Merton Hall

Desert Dust*

A ROMANCE OF THE BUILDING OF THE GREAT AMERICAN WEST

By Edwin L. Sabin

Author of "Scarface Ranch," "Opening the Iron Trail," etc.

ADVISED by the physicians to seek some high, dry region of the West, I decided to take the new transcontinental railroad then in course of construction across the plains and mountains dividing the Pacific Coast from the East. At Omaha I bought a ticket for Benton, the farthest point to which trains were running. One of my fellow travelers was a pretty woman with blue eyes and golden hair, and during the long journey we formed a casual friendship. I was lucky enough to save her from the unwelcome attentions of a drunken rowdy, a fellow known as Jim; and she invited me to look for her in Benton, where she lived, telling me that I could find her at the Big Tent.

Arrived at Benton—a raw frontier community of tents and makeshift wooden buildings, its dusty streets full of noise and confusion—I went to the Queen Hotel, which claimed to provide "a bath for every room." This proved to mean a common bath for all the rooms. Moreover, I had to share my bedchamber with two other guests, and five ahead of me were awaiting their turn for the bath. To pass the intervening time I sallied forth to view the town, accompanied by two affable but more or less questionable individuals who introduced themselves to me as Colonel Sunderson and Bill Brady.

V

THE sun had set, and all the golden twilight was hazy with the dust suspended in clouds over the ugly roofs. In the canvas-faced main street the throng and noise had increased rather than diminished at the approach of dusk. Although the clatter of dishes mingled with the confusion of other sounds, the people acted as if they had no thought of eating; and while aware of certain pangs myself, I felt a diffidence in proposing supper as yet.

My two companions hesitated a moment, spying up and down, which gave me opportunity to view the scene anew.

Surely such a hotchpotch never before populated an American town! I saw men flannel-shirted, high-booted, shaggy-haired, and bearded, stumping along weighted with cartridge-belts, and formidable revolvers balanced, not infrequently, by sheathed butcher-knives. These I took to be teamsters, miners, railroad graders, and the like.

There were other men white-skinned and clean-shaven, except perhaps for mustaches and goatees, in white silk shirts or ruffled bosoms, broadcloth trousers and trim footgear—unarmed, to all appearances, but evidently respected. There were also men of Eastern garb like myself—tourists, perhaps, or merchants.

I saw a squad of surveyors, wearing picturesque neckerchiefs, with revolvers on their belts; a number of trainmen, grimy engineers and firemen; a few soldiers; and here and there a clerk, as I opined, dapper and bustling, clad in the latest fashion, with a diamond in his flashy tie and a heavy gold watch-chain across his fancy waistcoat. There were also men whom I took to be Mexicans, by their velvet jackets, slashed pantaloons, and filigreed hats; darkly weathered, long-haired personages, no doubt scouts and trappers, in buckskins and moccasins; blanket-wrapped Indians; and women of various types.

Of the women a number were unmistakable as to vocation, being lavishly painted, strident, bold, and significantly dressed. I saw several in amazing costumes of tightly fitting black, like ballet girls—low-necked, short-skirted, with snake-skin belts around the waist, supporting handsome little pistols and dainty poniards. Contrasted, there were women of other classes and, I

did not doubt, of better repute—some in gowns and bonnets that would do them credit anywhere in New York, and some, of course, more commonly attired in calico and gingham, as proper to the humbler station of laundresses, cooks, and so forth.

Everywhere there was a jargon of shouts, hails, music, hammering, barking, scuff of feet, trample of horses and oxen, rumble of creaking wagons and Concord stages.

"Well, suh!" spoke the colonel, pulling his hat over his eyes. "Shall we stroll a piece?"

"Might better," assented Bill. "The gentleman may find something of interest right in the open. How are you on the goose, sir?" he demanded of me.

"The goose?" I uttered.

"Yes—keno."

"I am a stranger to the goose," said I.

He grunted.

"It gives a quick turn for a small stake. So do the three-card and rondo."

For a passageway there was not much choice between the middle of the street and the borders. It seemed to me, as we weaved along through groups of idlers and among busily stepping people, that every other shop was a saloon, with door widely open and bar and gambling-tables well attended. The odor of liquor saturated the acrid dust. The genuine shops, even of the rudest construction, were piled from front to rear with commodities of all kinds, and goods were heaped upon the ground in front and behind, as if the merchants had no time for unpacking.

The incessant hammering, I ascertained, came from amateur carpenters, including mere boys, here and there engaged, as if life depended upon their efforts, in erecting more buildings from knocked-down sections like cardboard puzzles, and from lumber already cut and numbered.

My guides nodded right and left with "Hello, Frank!" "How are you, Dan?" "Evening, Charley," and so on. Occasionally the colonel swept off his hat, with elaborate deference, to a woman; but I looked in vain for my lady in black. I did not see her—nor did I see her peer, despite the fact that now and then I observed a face and figure of apparent attractiveness.

Above the staccato of conversation and exclamation there arose the appeals of the barkers for the gambling-resorts.

"This way. Shall we see what he's got?" the colonel invited.

Forthwith, veering aside, he crossed the street in obedience to a summons of whoops and shouts loud enough to set the very dust to vibrating.

A crowd had gathered before a youth—a perspiring, red-faced youth with a billy-cock hat shoved back upon his bullet head—a youth in suspenders and soiled shirt and belled pantaloons, who, standing upon a box, was exhorting at the top of his lungs.

"Whoo-oop! This way, this way! Everybody this way! Come on, you rondo-coolo sports! Give us a bet! A bet! Rondo coolo-oh! Rondo coolo-oh! Here's your easy money! Down with your soap! Let her roll! Rondo coolo-oh!"

"It's a great game, suh," the colonel flung back over his shoulder.

We pushed to the front. The center for the crowd was a table not unlike a small billiard-table, or, saving the absence of pins, a tivoli-table such as enjoyed by children. Across one end there were several holes, into which balls—ten or a dozen, resembling miniature billiard-balls—might roll.

The balls had been banked in customary pyramid shape for a break, as in pool, at the opposite end; and just as we arrived they had been propelled forward, scattering, by a short cue rapidly swept across their base.

"Rondo coolo, suh," the colonel was explaining, "as you see, is an improvement on the old rondo, foh red-blooded people. You may place your bets in various ways—on the general run, or the odd or the even; and as the bank relies, suh, only on percentage, the popular game is strictly square. There is no chance foh a brace, in rondo coolo. Shall we take a turn, foh luck?"

The crowd was craning and eying the gyrating balls expectantly. A part of the balls entered the pockets; the remainder came to rest.

"Rondo!" announced the man with the short cue, amid excited ejaculations from winners and losers.

According to a system which I failed to grasp, except that it depended upon the number of balls pocketed, he deftly distributed from one collection of checks and coins to another, quickly absorbed by greedy hands.

"She rolls again! Make your bets, ladies and gents!" he intoned, as he reassembled the balls. "It's rondo coolo—simple rondo coolo!"

"I prefer not to play, sir," I responded to the heavily breathing colonel. "I am new here, and I cannot afford to lose until I am better established."

"Never yet seen a man who couldn't afford to win, though!" Bill growled. "Easy pickin', too. But come on, then. We'll give you a straight steer some'res else."

So we left the crowd—which contained women as well as men—to their insensate fervor over a childish game under the stimulation of the raucous, sweating barker. Of gambling devices, in the open of the street, there was no end.

My conductors appeared to have the passion, for our course led from one method of hazard to another — roulette, chuck-a-luck, where the patrons cast dice for prizes of money and valuables arrayed upon numbered squares of an oilcloth-covered board, and keno, where numbered balls were decanted one at a time from a bottle-shaped receptacle called, I learned, the "goose," and the players kept tab by filling in little cards as in domestic lotto. Finally we stopped at the simplest apparatus of all.

"The spiel game for me, gentlemen," said the colonel. "Here it is. Yes, suh, there's nothing like monte, where any man is privileged to match his eyes against fingers. Nobody but a blind man can lose at monte, by George!"

"And this spieler's on the level," Bill pronounced, *sotto voce*. "I vote we hook him for a gudgeon, and get the price of a meal. Our friend will join us in the turn. He can see for himself that he can't lose. He's got sharp eyes!"

The bystanders here were stationed before a man sitting at a low tripod table; and all that he had was the small table—a plain cheap table with folding legs—and three playing-cards. Business was a trifle slack. I thought that his voice crisped aggressively as we elbowed through, while he sat idly skimming the three cards over the table with a flick of his hand.

"Two jacks and the ace, gentlemen—there they are! I have faced them up. Now I gather them slowly—you can't miss them. Observe closely. The jack on top, between thumb and forefinger. The ace next—ace in the middle. The other jack at the bottom."

He turned his hand, with the three cards in a tier, so that all might see.

"The ace is the winning card. You are to locate the ace. Observe closely again. It's my hand against your eyes. I am going to throw. Who will spot the ace? Watch, everybody. Ready—go!"

The backs of the cards were up. With a swift movement he released the three, spreading them in a neat row, face down, upon the table. He carelessly shifted them hither and thither. His fingers were marvelously nimble, lightly touching.

"Twenty dollars against your twenty that you can't pick out the ace first try. I'll let the cards lie. I sha'n't disturb them. There they are. If you've watched the ace fall, you win. If you haven't, you lose unless you guess right."

"Just do that trick again, will you, for the benefit of my friend here?" bade the colonel.

The spieler — a thin-lipped, cadaverous individual with a pair of sloe eyes, his soft hat cavalierly aslant, his black hair combed flatly in a curve down upon his damp forehead, and a flannel shirt open upon his bony chest—glanced alert. He smiled.

"Hello, sir! I'm agreeable — yes, sir; but as they lie, will you make a guess? No? Or you, sir?" He addressed Bill. "No? Then you, sir?" He appealed to me. "No? But I'm a mind-reader. I can tell by your eyes. They're upon the right-end card. Aha! Correct!"

He had turned up the card and shown the ace.

"You should have bet. You would have beaten me, sir. You've got the eyes. I think you've seen this game before. No? Ah, but you have, or else you're born lucky. Now I'll try again. For the benefit of these three gentlemen I'll try again. Kindly reserve your bets, friends all, and you shall have your chance. This game never stops. I am always after revenge. Watch the ace! I pick up the cards. Ace first—blessed ace; *and* the jacks. Watch close! There you are!"

He briefly exposed the faces of the cards.

"Keep your eyes upon the ace—the ace! Ready—go!"

He spread the cards. As he released them, he tilted them slightly, and I clearly saw the ace land. The cards fell in the same order as arranged—to that I would have sworn.

"Five dollars now that any one card is not the ace," he challenged. "I shall not touch them. A small bet—just enough to make it interesting! Five dollars from you, sir?"

He looked at me direct. I shook my head; I was sternly resolved not to be tempted.

"What? No? You will wait another turn? Very well! How about you, sir?" to the colonel.

"I'll go halves with you, colonel," Bill proposed.

"I'm on," agreed the colonel. "There's the soap; and foh the honor of the grand old Empire State we will let our friend pick the ace foh us. I have faith in those eyes of his, suhs!"

"But that is scarcely fair, sir, when I am risking nothing," I protested.

"Go ahead, suh—go ahead!" he urged. "It is just a sporting proposition foh general entertainment."

"And I'll bet you a dollar on the side that you don't spot the ace," the dealer baited. "Come, now, make it interesting for yourself!"

"I'll not bet; but since you insist, there's the ace."

I turned up the right-end card.

"By the Eternal, he's done it! He has an eye like an eagle's," praised the dealer, with evident chagrin. "I lose. Once again, now. Everybody in, this time."

He gathered the cards.

"I'll play against you all, this gentleman included; and if I lose, why, that's life, gentlemen. Some of us win, some of us lose. Watch the ace and have your money ready! You can follow this gentleman's tip. I'm afraid he's smarter than me, but I'm game!"

He was too insistent. Somehow I did not like him, and I was beginning to be suspicious of my company. Their minds trended entirely toward gambling; to remain with them meant nothing but the gaming-tables, and I was hungry.

"You'll have to excuse me, gentlemen," I pleaded. "Another time, but not now. I wish to eat and to bathe, and I have an engagement following."

"Gad, suh!" The colonel fixed me with his fishy eyes. "Foh God's sake don't break your winning streak with eatin' and washin'! Fortune is a fickle jade, suh; she's hostile when slapped in the face."

Bill glowered at me, but I was firm.

"If you will give me the pleasure of taking supper with me at some good place—" I suggested, as they pursued me into the street.

"We can't talk this over while we're dry," the colonel objected. "That is a human impossibility. Let us libate, suhs, in order to tackle our provender in proper spirit."

"And no lemonade goes this time, either," Bill declared. "That brand of a drink is insultin' to good victuals."

We were standing, for the moment, verging upon an argument much to my distaste, when on a sudden who should come tripping along but my lady of the blue eyes? Yes, it was the very flesh and action of her, her face shielded from the dust by a little sunshade.

She saw me, recognized me in startled fashion, and bowed, with a swift glance at my two companions. My hat was off in a twinkling, with a bow in my best manner. The colonel barely had time to imitate me ere, leaving me a quick smile, she had gone on. He and Bill stared after her, and then at me.

"Gad, suh! You know the lady?" the colonel ejaculated.

"I have the honor. We were passengers upon the same train."

"Clean through, you mean?" queried Bill.

"Yes. We happened to get on together at Omaha."

"I congratulate you, suh," affirmed the colonel. "We were not aware, suh, that you had an acquaintance of that nature in this city."

Again congratulated over my fortune! It mounted to my head, but I preserved decorum.

"A casual acquaintance. We were merely travelers by the same route at the same time. And now, if you will recommend a good eating-place and be my guests at supper, after that, as I have said, I must be excused. By the way, while I think of it," I carelessly added, "can you direct me how to get to the Big Tent?"

"The Big Tent? If I am not intruding, suh, does your engagement comprise the Big Tent?"

"Yes; but I failed to get the address."

The colonel swelled; his fishy eyes hardened their gaze upon me as with righteous indignation.

"Suh, you are too damned innocent! You come here, suh, imposing as a stranger, suh, and throwing yourself on our goodness, suh, to entertain you; and you conceal your irons in the fiah under your hat, suh. Do we look green, suh? What is your voca-

tion, suh? I believe, by gad, suh, that you are a common capper foh some infernal skinning game, or that you are a professional. Suh, I call your hand!"

I was about to retort hotly that I had not requested their chaperonage, and that my affair with my lady and the Big Tent, howsoever they might take it, was my own, when Mr. Brady, who likewise had been glaring at me, growled morosely.

"She's waitin' for you. You can square with us later, and if there's something doin' on the table we want a show."

The black-clad figure had lingered at a little distance, ostensibly gazing into a window, but now and again darting a glance in our direction. I accepted the glances as a token of inclination on her part, and without saying another word to my ruffled bodyguards I approached her.

She received me with a quick turn of the head, as if not expecting me, but with a subtle smile.

"Well, sir?"

"Madam," I uttered foolishly, "good evening!"

"You have left your friends?"

"Very willingly. Whether they are really my friends I rather question. They have seen fit to escort me about—that is all."

"And I have rescued you?" She smiled again. "Believe me, sir, you would be better off alone. I know the gentlemen. They have been paid for their trouble, have they not?"

"They won a little at gambling, but in that I had no hand," I replied. "So far they have asked nothing more."

"And you put up no stakes?"

"No, indeed—not a penny, madam. Why should I?"

"To make it interesting, as they doubtless said. The colonel, as all the town knows, is a notorious capper and steerer, and the fellow Brady is no better, no worse. Had you stayed with them and suffered them to persuade you into betting, you would soon have been fleeced as clean as a shaved pig. The little gains they are permitted to make, to draw you on, are their pay. Their losses, if any, would have been restored to them, but not yours to you."

"Strange to say, they have just accused me of being a capper," I answered, nettled as I began to comprehend.

"From what cause, sir?"

"They seemed to think that I am smarter than I claim to be, for one thing." Of course I could not involve her in the subject, and indeed I could not understand why she should have been held responsible, anyway. "And probably they were peeved because I insisted upon eating supper and then following my own bent."

"You were about to leave them?" Her face brightened. "That is good. They were disappointed in finding you no gudgeon to be hooked by such raw methods. And you have not had supper yet? Promise me that you will take up with no more strangers, or, I assure you, you may wake in the morning with your pockets turned inside out and your memory at fault. This is Benton."

"Yes, this is Benton, is it?" I rejoined, perhaps somewhat bitterly.

"Benton, Wyoming Territory, of three thousand people in two weeks—in another month, who knows how many? And the majority of us live on one another. The country furnishes nothing else. Still, you will find it not much different from what I told you."

"I have found it high and dry, certainly," said I.

"Where are you stopping?"

"At the Queen—with a bath for every room. I am now awaiting my turn at the end of another hour."

"Oh!" She laughed heartily. "You are fortunate, sir. The Queen may not be considered the best in all ways, but they say the towels for the baths are more than napkin size. Meanwhile, let me advise you. Outfit while you wait, and become of the country. You look too much the pilgrim. There is Eastern dust showing through our Benton dust, and that spells of other dust in your pockets. Get another hat, a flannel shirt, some coarser trousers, a pair of boots. Don a gun and a swagger, say little, make few impromptu friends, win and lose without a smile or frown, if you play—but upon playing I will advise you later. Pass as a surveyor, as a railroad clerk, as a Mormon—anything they choose to apply to you; and I shall hope to see you to-night."

"You shall," I assured, abashed by her raillery. "And if you will be so kind as to tell me—"

"The meals at the Belle Marie Café are as good as any. You can see the sign from here. So *adios*, sir, and remember!"

With no mention of the Big Tent she flashed a smile at me and mingled with the other pedestrians crossing the street on di-

agonal course. As I had not been invited to accompany her, I stood gratefully digesting her remarks.

When I turned for a final word with my two guides, they had vanished. This I interpreted as a confession of jealous fear that I had been, in slang phrasing, "put wise"; and, sooth to say, I saw them again no more.

VI

THE counsel to don a garb smacking less of the recent East struck me as sound; for although I was not the only person here in Eastern guise, nevertheless about the majority of the populace there was an easy aggressiveness that my appearance evidently lacked.

"I beg your pardon. What time do the stores close, can you tell me?" I asked of the nearest bystander.

He surveyed me.

"Close? Hell!" he said. "They don't close for even a dog-fight, pardner. Business runs twenty-five hours every day, seven days the week, in these diggin's."

"And where will I find a haberdashery?"

"A what? Talk English? What you want?"

"I want an outfit—a personal outfit."

"Blanket to moccasins? Levi's, stranger. Levi'll outfit you complete and throw in a yellow purp under the wagon."

"And where is Levi's?"

"There." He jerked his head aside. "You could shut your eyes and spit in the doorway."

With that he rudely turned his back upon me; but sure enough, by token of the large sign "Levi's Mammoth Emporium—Liquors, Groceries, and General Merchandise," I was standing almost in front of the store itself.

I entered into the seething aisle flanked by heaped-up counters and stacked goods that bulged the partially boarded canvas walls. At last I gained position near one of the perspiring clerks and caught his eye.

"Yes, sir! You, sir? What can I do for you, sir?"

He rubbed his hands alertly, on edge with a long day.

"I wish a hat, a flannel shirt, a serviceable ready-made suit, boots, possibly other matters."

"We have exactly the things for you, sir. This way!"

I began to make my selections.

"Going out on the advance line, sir?" he asked.

"That is not unlikely."

"They're doing great work. Three miles of track laid yesterday; twelve so far this week—averaging two and one-half miles a day, and promising better."

"So I understand," I alleged.

"General Jack Casement is a world-beater. If he could get the iron as fast as he could use it, he'd build through to California without a halt; but it looks now as if somewhere between would have to satisfy him. You're a surveyor, I take it?"

"Yes, I am surveying on the line along with the others," I answered; and surveying the country I was.

"You are the gentlemen who lay out the course," he complimented. "Now, is there something else, sir?"

"I also need a good revolver, a belt, and ammunition."

"We carry the reliable—the Colt's. That's the only belt gun employed out here. Please step across, sir."

He led.

"If you're not particular as to shine," he resumed, "we have a second-hand outfit that I can sell you cheap. Took it in as a deposit, and the gentleman has never called for it. Of course you're broken in to the country, but, as you know, new belts and holsters are apt to be viewed with suspicion, and a gentleman sometimes has to draw when he'd rather not, to prove himself. This gun has been used just enough to take the roughness off the trigger-pull. The furniture for it is O. K.—and all at half price."

I was glad to find something cheap. The boots had been fifteen dollars, the hat eight, shirt and suit in proportion, and the red silk handkerchief two dollars and a half. Yes, Benton was high!

With my bulky parcel I sought the Belle Marie Café, ate my supper, and hastened through the gloaming to the hotel for bath and change of costume. I had yet time to array myself, as an experiment and a lark; and that I foolishly did, hurriedly tossing my old garments upon bed and floor, in order to invest with the new.

The third bed was occupied when I came in—occupied on the outside by a plump, round-faced, dust-scalded man, with piggish features accentuated by his small bloodshot eyes. He was dressed in Eastern mode, but was stripped to the suspenders,

as was the local custom. He lay upon his back, his puffy hands folded across his spherical abdomen, where his pantaloons met a sweaty pink-striped shirt; and he panted wheezingly through his nose.

"Hell of a country, ain't it?" he observed. "You a stranger, too?"

"I have been here a short time, sir."

"Thought so! Jest beginnin' to peel, like me. I been here two days. What's your line?"

"I have a number of things in view," I evaded.

"Well, you don't have to tell 'em," he granted. "Thought you was a salesman. I'm from St. Louie, myself. Sell groceries, and pasteboards on the side. Cards are the stuff! I got the best line of sure-thing stock — strippers, humps, rounds, squares, briefs, and marked backs—that ever were dealt west of the Missouri. Judas Priest, but this is a roarer of a burg! What it ain't got I never seen—and I ain't no spring goslin', neither. I've plenty sand in my craw. You ain't been plucked yet?"

"No, sir. I never gamble."

"Wish I didn't, but my name's Jakey, and I'm a good feller. Say, I'm supposed to be wise, too, but they trimmed me two hundred dollars! Now I'm gettin' out." He groaned. "Take the train in a few minutes. Dasn't risk myself on the street again. Sent my baggage down for fear I'd lose it. Say," he added, watching me, "looks like you was goin' out, yourself. One of them surveyor fellers, workin' for the railroad?"

"It might be so, sir," I replied.

He half sat up.

"You'll want to throw a leg, I bet! Lemme tell you. It's a hell of a town, but it's got some fine wimmen; yes, and a few straight banks, too. You're no crabber or piker—I can seen that. You go to the North Star. Tell Frank that Jakey sent you. They'll treat you white. You be sure and say Jakey sent you; but for Gawd's sake keep out of the Big Tent!"

"The Big Tent?" I said. "Why so?"

"They'll sweat you there," he groaned lugubriously. "Say, friend, could you lend me twenty dollars? You've still got your roll, and I haven't a stivver. I'm busted flat!"

"I'm sorry that I can't accommodate you, sir," said I. "I have no more money than will see me through—and according to your story perhaps not enough."

"I've told you of the North Star. You mention Jakey sent you. You'll make more than your twenty back at the North Star," he urged. "If it hadn't been for that damned Big Tent—" and he ended with a dismal grunt.

By this time, all the while conscious of his devouring eyes, I had changed my clothing, and now I stood equipped cap-à-pie, with my hat clapped at an angle, my pantaloons in my boots, my red silk handkerchief tastefully knotted at my throat, and my six-shooter slung. I could scarcely deny that in my own eyes—and in his, I trusted—I was a pretty figure of a Westerner, who would win the approval, as seemed to me, of my lady in black or any other lady.

His reflection upon the Big Tent, however, was the fly in my ointment. Therefore, preening and adjusting with assumed carelessness, I queried in real concern:

"What about the Big Tent? Where is it? Isn't it respectable?"

"Respectable? Of course it's respectable! You don't ketch your Jakey in no place that ain't. I've a family to think of. You ain't been there? Say! There's where they all meet, in that Big Tent—all the best people, too, you bet you; but I tell you, friend—"

He did not finish. An uproar sounded above the other street clamors — a pistol shot, and another—a chorus of hoarse shouts and shrill, frightened cries, the scurrying rush of feet, all in the street; and in the hall of the hotel, and the lobby below, the rush of still more feet, booted, and the din of excited voices.

My man on the bed dived for the window with the agility of a jack-in-the-box.

"A fight, a fight! Shootin' scrape!"

Grabbing coat and hat in a single motion he was out through the door and pelting down the hall. Overcome by the zest of the moment, I pelted after, and with several others plunged as madly upon the porch. We had left the lobby deserted.

The shots had ceased. Now a baying mob ramped through the street.

"Hang him! Hang him! String him up!" men were shouting.

Borne on by a hysterical company, I saw, first, a figure bloody-chested and inert flat in the dust, with stooping figures trying to raise him; then, beyond, a bareheaded man, whiskered, but as white as death, hustled to and fro by clutching

hands and suddenly forced in firm grips up the street. The mob trailed after, whooping, cursing, shrieking, flourishing guns and knives and ropes. There were women as well as men in it.

All this turned me sick. From the outskirts of the throng I tramped back to my room and the bath. The hotel was quiet, as if emptied. My room was vacant—and more than vacant, for of my clothing not a vestige remained. My bag also was gone.

Worse yet, prompted by an inner voice that stabbed me like an icicle, I was awakened to the knowledge that every cent I had possessed was in those vanished garments of mine!

For an instant I stood paralyzed, fronting this serious calamity. I could not believe my eyes. It was as if the floor had swallowed my belongings. I had been absent not more than five minutes. Surely this was the room? Yes, No. 6; and the beds were familiar, their tumbled covers unaltered.

My first thought was to hold the bathroom responsible. The scoundrel in the bath had heard, had taken advantage, had made a foray, and had hidden with his spoils.

Out I ran, exploring. Every room door was wide open, every apartment vacant; but from the bath there came the sound of splashing. I listened at the threshold, gently tried the knob—and received such a cry of angry protest that it sent me to the right-about on tiptoe. The thief was not in the bath.

My heart sank as I bolted down to the office. The clerk had reinstated himself behind the counter. He composedly greeted me, with calm voice and with eyes that noted my costume.

"You can have your bath as soon as the porter gets back from the hanging, sir," he said. "That is, unless you'd prefer to hurry up by toting your own water. The party now in will be out directly."

"Never mind the bath!" I replied, breathless, in a voice that I scarcely recognized, so piping and aghast it was. "I've been robbed—of money, clothes, baggage, everything!"

"What at?" he queried, with a glimmer of a smile—supposing, apparently, that I had been gambling.

"What at? In my room, I tell you! I had just changed, to try these things, when the street fight began. I was gone not five minutes, and nevertheless my room was sacked—absolutely sacked!"

"That," he commented evenly, "is hard luck."

"Hard luck!" I hotly rejoined. "It's an outrage! But you seem remarkably cool about it, sir. What do you propose to do?"

"I?" He lifted his brows. "Nothing. They're not my valuables."

"But this is a respectable hotel, isn't it?" I asked him.

"Exactly so, but no orphan asylum. We attend strictly to our business, and we expect our guests to attend to theirs."

"I was told that it was safe for me to leave my things in my room."

"Not by me, sir. Read that!" And he called my attention to a placard which said, among other matters:

We are not responsible for property of any nature left by guests in their rooms.

"Where's the chief of police?" I demanded. "You have officers here, I hope?"

"Yes, sir. The marshal is the chief of police, and he's the whole show. The provost guard from the post helps out when necessary. You'll find the marshal at the mayor's office, or else at the North Star gambling-hall, three blocks up the street. I don't think he'll do you any good, though. He's not likely to bother with small matters, especially when he's dealing faro bank. He has an interest in the North Star. You'll never see your property again—take my word for it."

"I won't? Why not?"

"You've played the gudgeon for somebody—that's all. Easiest thing in the world for a smart gentleman to slip into your room while you were absent, go through it, and make his getaway by the end of the hall, out over the kitchen roof. It's been done many a time."

"A traveling salesman saw me dressing. He went out before me, but he might have doubled back," I gasped. "He had one of the beds. Who is he?"

"I don't know him, sir."

"A round-bellied, fat-faced man—sold groceries and playing-cards."

"There is no such guest in your room, sir. You have the first bed. The second is assigned to Mr. Bill Brady, who doubtless will be in soon. The third is temporarily vacant."

"The man said he was about to catch the train for the East," I pursued desperately. "A round-bellied, fat-faced man in a pink striped shirt—"

"If he was to catch the train, it has just pulled out."

"And who was in the bath, ten or fifteen minutes ago?"

"My wife, sir; and still there. She has to take her chances like everybody else. No, sir; you've been done. You may find your clothes, but I doubt it. You are next upon the bath list." He became all business. "The porter will carry up the water and notify you. You are allowed twenty minutes. Is that satisfactory?"

A bath, now!

"No, certainly not!" I replied. "I have no time or inclination for a bath, at present. And," I faltered, ashamed, "I shall have to ask you to refund me the dollar and a half I paid for one. I haven't a cent!"

"Under the circumstances I can do that, although it is against our rules," he said. "Here it is, sir. We wish to accommodate, you see."

"And will you advance me twenty dollars, say, until I shall have procured funds from the East?" I ventured.

A mask fell over the clerk's face. He slightly smiled.

"No, sir; I cannot. We never advance money."

"But I've got to have money to tide me over, man!" I pleaded. "This dollar and a half will barely pay for a meal. I can give you references—"

"From Colonel Sunderson, may I ask?"

"No, I never saw the colonel before. My references are Eastern. My father—"

"As a gentleman, the colonel is O. K.," he smoothly interrupted. "I do not question his integrity, or your father's; but we never advance money. It is against the policy of the house."

"Has my trunk come up yet?" I queried.

"Yes, sir. If you'd rather have it in your room—"

"In my room!" said I. "No! Else it might walk out of the window, too. You have it safe?"

"Perfectly, except in case of burglary or fire. It is out of the weather. We're not responsible for theft or fire, you understand—not in Benton."

"Good Lord!" I ejaculated, feeling weak. "You have my trunk, you say? Very good! Will you advance me twenty dollars and keep the trunk as security? That, I think, is a business proposition."

He eyed me up and down.

"Are you a surveyor? Connected with the road?"

"No."

"What is your business, then?"

"I'm a damned fool," I confessed. "I'm a gudgeon—I'm a come-on. In fact, as I've said before, I'm out here looking for health, where it's high and dry." He smiled. "And high and dry I'm landed in short order! But the trunk's not empty. Will you keep it and lend me twenty dollars? I presume that trunk and its contents are worth two hundred."

"I'll speak with the porter, sir," he answered.

Judging from the lapse of time between his departure and his return, he and the gnome had evidently hefted the trunk and viewed it at all angles. Now he came back with quick step.

"Yes, sir; we'll advance you twenty dollars on your trunk. Here is the money, sir." He passed me the bills, and a slip of paper also. "And your receipt. When you pay the twenty dollars, if within thirty days, you can have your trunk."

"And if not?" I asked uncomfortably.

"We shall be privileged to dispose of it. We are not in the pawn business, but we have trunks piled to the ceiling in our storeroom, left by gentlemen in embarrassed circumstances, like yourself."

I never saw that trunk again, either. However, of this more anon. At that juncture I was only too glad to get the twenty dollars, pending the time when I should be recouped from home; for I could see that to be stranded "high and dry" in Benton City of Wyoming Territory would be a dire situation.

I could not hope for much from home. It was a bitter dose to have to ask for further help. Three years returned from the war, my father had scarcely yet been enabled to gather together the loose ends of his former affairs.

"Now, if you will direct me to the telegraph office—" I suggested.

"The telegraph here is the Union Pacific Railroad line," he informed; "and that is open only to government and official business. If you wish to send a private despatch, you will have to forward it by post to Cheyenne, one hundred and seventy-five miles, where it will be put on the overland

line for the East. The rate to New York is eight dollars, prepaid."

I knew that my face fell. Eight dollars would make a large hole in my slender funds. I had been foolish not to have borrowed fifty dollars on the trunk. So I decided to write instead of telegraphing; and with the clerk watching me I endeavored to speak lightly.

"Thank you. Where can I find the place known as the Big Tent?"

He laughed with peculiar emphasis.

"If you had mentioned the Big Tent sooner, you'd have got no twenty dollars from me, sir! Not that I've anything against it, understand. It's all right, and everybody goes there—perfectly legitimate. I sometimes go there myself; and you may redeem your trunk to-morrow and be buying champagne."

"I am to meet a friend at the Big Tent," I stiffly explained. "Further than that I have no business there. I know nothing whatever about it."

"I beg your pardon, sir. No offense intended. The Big Tent is highly regarded—a great place to spend a pleasant evening. All Benton indulges. I wish you the best of luck, sir. You are heeled, I see. No one will take you for a pilgrim." Despite the assertion, there was a twinkle in his eye. "You will find the Big Tent one block and a half down this street. You cannot miss it."

VII

THE hotel lamps were being lighted by the gnome porter. When I stepped outside, twilight had deepened into dusk, the air was almost frosty, and the main street of Benton had been made garish by its nightly illumination.

It was a strange sight, as I paused for a moment upon the plank veranda of the hotel. The street resembled a fair. As if inspired by the freshness and coolness of the evening air, the people were trooping to and fro more restlessly than ever, and in greater numbers.

All up and down the street coal-oil torches or flambeaus, ruddily embossing the heads of the players and onlookers, flared like votive braziers above the open-air gambling games. There were lamps with smoked chimneys, and even candles, set on pedestals, signalizing other centers. The canvas walls of tents glowed spectral from the lights to be glimpsed through doorways and windows, and grotesque, gigantic figures flitted in silhouette.

The noise had, if anything, increased. To the exclamations, the riotous shouts and whoops, the footsteps of a busy crowd, the harangues of the barkers, the more distant puffing and shrieking of the locomotives in the railroad yards, the hammering where men and boys worked by torchlight, and now and then a revolver shot, there had been added the discordant but inciting music of fiddles, cymbals, horns, and other instruments.

Night at Benton had plainly begun with gusto. It stirred one's blood. It summoned with such a promise of variety, of adventure, of flotsam and jetsam and shuttlecock of chance, that I, a youth with twenty-one dollars and a half at his disposal, all his clothes on his back, a man's weapon at his belt, and an appointment with a lady as his future, forgetful of the past and courageous in the present, strode on confidently, even recklessly, as eager for excitement as one to the manner of the country born.

The mysterious allusions to the Big Tent piqued me. It was a rendezvous, popular, I deemed, and respectable, I had been assured. It was an amusement place, judging by the talk; superior, undoubtedly, to other resorts that I may have noted.

I was well equipped to test it out, for I had little to lose, and time was of no moment to me. Moreover, I possessed a friend at court there, whom I had interested, and who very agreeably interested me. This single factor would have glorified with a halo any tent, big or little, in Benton.

There was no need for me to inquire my way to the Big Tent. Upon pushing along down the street, beset upon my course by many proffered allurements, keenly alive to the romance of this hurly-burly of pleasure and business combined two thousand miles west of New York, and always expectant of my goal, I was attracted by music, just ahead, from an orchestra. I saw a large canvas sign—"The Big Tent"—suspended in the full shine of a locomotive headlight. Beneath it people were streaming into the wide entrance to a great canvas hall.

Presently, quickening my pace in accord with the increased pace of the throng, I likewise entered, unchallenged for any admission fee. Once across the threshold, I halted, taken all aback by the hubbub and

the kaleidoscopic spectacle that beat upon my ears and eyes.

The interior, high-ceilinged to the ridged roof, was unbroken by supports. It was lighted by about two-score lamps and reflectors set in brackets along the walls and hanging as chandeliers from the rafters. The floor, of planed boards, already teemed with men, women, and even children. Along one side there was an ornate bar glittering with cut glass and silver and backed by a large plate mirror, which repeated the lights, the people, the glasses, decanters, and pitchers, and the figures of the busy white-coated bartenders.

At the farther end of the room a stringed orchestra was stationed upon a platform, while to the bidding of the music women and men—the latter, in most cases, with hats upon their heads and cigars in their mouths—whirled in couples, so that the floor trembled to the boot-heels. The men predominated in number, and some of them were dancing with partners of their own sex.

Scattered thickly over the intervening space were games of chance of almost every description, surrounded by groups looking on or playing. Through the atmosphere blue with smoke strolled women, many of them lavishly costumed as if for a ball, risking gallantries or responding to them. The garb of the men ran the gamut from the *comme il faut* of slender shoes, fashionably cut coats and pantaloons, and modish cravats, through the campaign uniforms of army officers and enlisted men, to the frontier corduroy and buckskin of surveyors and adventurers, and to the red, blue, or gray flannel shirts, the jeans and cowhide boots of trainmen, teamsters, graders, and miners.

From nearly every waist dangled a revolver. I remarked that not a few of the women displayed little weapons, as in bravado.

What with the music, the stamp of the dancers, the clink of glasses and the ice in pitchers, the rattle of dice, the slap of cards and currency, the announcements of the dealers, the claptrap of barkers and monte-spielers, the general chatter of voices, one such as I, a newcomer, scarcely knew which way to turn. Altogether this was an amusement palace which, though rough of exterior, eclipsed the best of the Bowery, and might be found elsewhere, I imagined, not short of San Francisco.

From the jostle of the doorway to pick out upon the floor any single figure and follow it was well-nigh impossible. Not seeing my lady in black at first sight—not being certain of her, that is, for there were a number of black dresses—I moved into the tent. It might be that she was among the dancers, where, as I could determine by the vista, beauty appeared to be whirling around in the embrace of the whiskered beast.

Then, as I advanced resolutely among the gaming-tables, I felt a cuff upon the shoulder and heard a bluff voice in my ear.

"Hello, old hoss! How are tricks by this time?"

Facing about quickly, with apprehension of having been spotted by another capper, if not Bill Brady himself—for the voice was not Colonel Sunderson's unctuous tones—I saw Jim of the Sidney station platform and the railway coach fracas. He was apparently none the worse for wear, save a slightly swollen lower lip. He seemed in good humor with all the world, and was grinning affably.

"Shake!" he proffered, extending his hand. "No hard feelin's here. I'm no Injun. You knocked the red-eye out o' me!"

I shook hands with him, and again he slapped me upon the shoulder.

"Hardly knowed you in that new rig. That's sense! Well, how you comin' on?"

"First rate," I assured him.

I was somewhat nonplused by this greeting from a man whom I had knocked down, tipsy drunk, only a few hours before; but evidently he was a seasoned customer. He leered cunningly.

"Bucked the tiger a leetle, I reckon?"

"No; I rarely gamble."

"Aw, tell that to the marines!" Once more he jovially slapped me. "A young gent like you has to take a fling now and then. Hell, this is Benton, where everything goes, and nobody the worse for it. Trail along with me, and let's likker; then I'll show you the ropes. I like your style. Yes, sir! I know a man when I see him;" and he swore freely.

"Another time, sir," I begged off. "I have an engagement this evening—"

"O' course you have! Don't I know that, too, by Gawd? Didn't she tell me to keep my eyes skinned for you, and to cotton to you when you come in? We'll find her after we likker up."

"She did?"

"Why not? Ain't I a friend o' hern? You bet! Finest little woman in Benton. Trail to the trough along with me, pardner, and name your favor-ite. I've got a thirst like a Sioux buck with a robe to trade!"

"I'd rather not drink, thank you," I essayed.

Jim would have none of it. He seized me by the arm and hustled me on.

"O' course you'll drink! Any gent I ax to drink has got to drink. Name your pizen—make it champagne, if that's your brand; but the drinks are on me."

So willy-nilly I was brought to the bar, where the line of men already loafing there made space.

"Straight goods, and the best you've got, too!" my self-appointed pilot blared. "None o' your agency whisky, either! What's yourn?" he asked of me.

"The same as yours, sir," I bravely replied.

With never a word the bartender shoved bottle and glasses to us. Jim rather unsteadily filled; I imitated, but in scanter measure.

"Here's how," he volunteered. "May you never see the back of your neck!"

"Your health," I responded.

We drank. The stuff may have been pure; at any rate it was strong, and cut in a fiery way down my unwonted throat. The one draft infused me with a swagger and a sudden rosy view of life through a temporary mist of watering eyes.

"A-ah! That puts guts into a man," quoth Jim. "Shall we have another—one more?"

"Not now. The next shall be on me. Let's look around," I gasped.

"We'll find her," he promised. "Take a stroll. I'll steer you right. Have a seegar, anyway."

As smoking vied with drinking here in the Big Tent, I saw fit to humor him.

"Cigars it shall be, then; but I'll pay."

At my nod the bartender set out a box, from which we selected at twenty-five cents each. With my own "seegar" cocked up between my lips, and my revolver adequately heavy at my belt, I suffered the guidance of the importunate Jim.

We wended leisurely among games of infinite variety—keno, rondo coolo, poker, faro, roulette, monte, chuck-a-luck, wheels of fortune. Some were loudly advertised by their barkers, but the better class—if there is such a distinction—were presided over by remarkably quiet, white-faced, nimble-fingered, steady-eyed gentry in irreproachable garb, running much to white shirts, black pantaloons, velvet waistcoats, and polished boots, with diamonds and gold chains worn unaffectedly. Low-voiced gentry, these, protected, it would appear, mainly by the lookouts perched at their sides with eyes alert to read faces and to watch the play.

We had by no means completed our tour, which was interrupted by many jests and nods exchanged between Jim and sundry of the patrons, when we indeed met my lady. She detached herself, as if cognizant of our approach, from a little group of four or five standing upon the floor; and turned toward me with hand outstretched and a gratifying flush upon her spirited face.

"You are here, then?" she greeted me.

I made a leg, with my best bow, not omitting to remove hat and cigar, while agreeably conscious of my lady's approving gaze.

"I am here, madam, in the Big Tent."

Her small, warm hand acted as if unreservedly mine, for the moment. About her there was a tingling element of the friendly, even of the intimate. She was like a haven on a strange coast.

"Told you I'd find him, didn't I?" Jim asserted—the bystanders listening curiously. "There he was, lookin' as lonesome as a two-bit piece on a poker-table in a sky-limit game; so we had a drink and a seegar, and been makin' the grand tower."

"You got your outfit, I see," she smiled.

"Yes. Am I correct?"

"You have saved yourself annoyance. You'll do," she nodded. "Have you played yet? Win or lose?"

"I did not come to play, madam," said I. "Not at table, that is."

Whereupon I must have returned her gaze so glowingly as to embarrass her. Yet she was not displeased; and in that costume, and with that liquor still coursing through my veins, I felt equal to any retort.

"But you should play. You are heeled?"

"The best I could procure."

I let my hand rest casually upon my revolver butt. She laughed merrily.

"Oh, no! I did not mean that. You are heeled for all to see. I meant, you have funds? You did not come here too light, did you?"

"I am prepared for all emergencies, madam — certainly," I averred with proper dignity.

Not for the world would I have confessed otherwise. Sooth to say, I had the sensation of boundless wealth. The affair at the hotel did not bother me now. Here in the Big Tent prosperity reigned. Money, money, money was passing back and forth, carelessly shoved out and carelessly pocketed or piled up, while the band played and the people laughed and drank, and danced and bragged and staked, and laughed again.

"That is good. Shall we walk a little? And when you play—come here." We stepped apart from the listeners. "When you play, follow the lead of Jim. He'll not lose, and I intend that you sha'n't, either; but you must play, for the sport of it. Everybody games in Benton."

"So I judge, madam," I assented. "Under your chaperonage I am ready to take any risks, the gaming-table being among the least."

"Prettily said, sir," she complimented. "And you won't lose. No," she repeated suggestively, "you won't lose, with me looking out for you. Jim bears you no ill-will, I assure you. He recognizes a man when he meets him, even when the proof is uncomfortable."

"For that little episode on the train I ask no reward, madam," said I.

"Of course not!" Her tone waxed impatient. "However, you're a stranger in Benton, and strangers do not always fare well." In this she spoke the truth. "As a resident I claim the honors. Let us be old acquaintances. Shall we walk, or would you rather dance?"

"I'd cut a sorry figure dancing in boots," said I. "Therefore I'd really prefer to walk, if it's the same to you."

"Thank you for having mercy on my poor feet. Walk we will."

"May I get you some refreshments?" I hazarded. "A lemonade — or something stronger?"

"Not for you, sir; not again," she laughed. "You are, as Jim would say, fortified; and I shall need all my wits to keep you from being tolled away by greater attractions."

With that she accepted my arm. We promenaded, Jim sauntering near. As she was emphatically the superior of all other women upon the floor, I did not fail to dilate with the distinction accorded me. I felt it in the glances, the deference, and the ready make-way which attended upon our progress. Frankly to say, possibly I strutted—as a young man will when fortified within and without, and elevated from the station of nondescript stranger to that of favored beau.

Whereas an hour before I had been crushed and beggarly, now I turned out my toes and stepped bravely, my twenty-one dollars in pocket, my six-shooter at belt, a red kerchief at throat, the queen of the hall on my arm, and my trunk all unnecessary to my well-being.

Thus in easy fashion we moved amid glances and salutations from the various degrees of the company. She made no mention of any husband—which might have been odd in the East, but did not impress me as strange in this less formal and more democratic country. The women of the Far West appeared to have an independence of action.

"Shall we risk a play or two?" she proposed. "Are you acquainted with three-card monte?"

"Indifferently, madam," said I. "I am green at all gambling devices."

"You shall learn," she encouraged lightly. "In Benton as in Rome, you know. There is no disgrace attached to laying down a dollar here and there—we all do it. It is part of our amusement, in Benton." She halted. "You are game, sir? What is life but a series of chances? Are you disposed to win a little and flout the danger of losing?"

"I am in Benton to win," I valiantly asserted; "and if under your direction, so much the quicker. What first, then—the three-card monte?"

"It is the simplest. Faro would be beyond you as yet. Rondo coolo is boisterous and confusing. As for poker, that is a long session of nerves, while chuck-a-luck, though all in the open, is for children and fools. You might throw the dice a thousand times and never cast a lucky combination. Roulette is as bad. Even in a square game, the percentage in favor of the bank is forty per cent better than stealing. I'll initiate you on monte. Are your eyes quick?"

"For some things," I replied meaningly.

She conducted me to the nearest monte game, where the spieler—a smooth-faced lad of not more than nineteen—sat behind

his little green-covered, three-legged table. While idly shifting the cards about he maintained a rather bored flow of conversational incitement to bets.

As it happened, he was poorly patronized at the moment. There were not more than three or four onlookers, none risking a stake, but all apparently waiting upon one another.

At our arrival, the youth glanced up with the most innocent pair of long-lashed brown eyes that I ever had seen. A handsome boy he was.

"Hello, Bob!"

He smiled, with white teeth.

"Hello yourself!"

My lady and he seemed to know each other.

"How goes it to-night, Bob?"

"Slow. There's no nerve or money in this camp any more. She's a dead one."

"I'll not have Benton slandered," my lady gaily retorted. "We'll buck your game, Bob; but you must be easy on us. We're green yet."

Bob shot a quick glance at me—in one look he read me from hat to boots. He had shrewder eyes than their first languor intimated.

"Pleased to accommodate you, I'm sure," he answered. "The greenies stand as good a show as the profesh at this board."

"Will you play for a dollar, Bob?" she challenged.

"I'll play for two bits to-night. Anything to start action!" He twisted his mouth with ready chagrin. "I'm about ripe to bet against myself."

She fumbled at her reticule, but I was beforehand.

"No, no!" I fished in my pocket. "Allow me. I will furnish the funds if you will do the playing."

"I choose the card?" said she. "That is up to you, sir. You are to learn."

"By watching, at first," I protested. "We should be partners."

"Well, if you say so," she consented, "partners it is. A lady brings luck, but I shall not always do your playing for you, sir. That kind of partnership comes to grief."

"I am hopeful of playing on my own score in due time," I responded.

"What's the card, Bob? We've a dollar on it, as a starter."

He eyed her while facing the cards up.

"The ace. You see it—the ace, backed by ten and deuce. Here it is. All ready?"

He turned the three cards down in order; methodically, even listlessly, moved them to and fro, yet with light, sure, well-nigh bewildering touch; and suddenly lifted his hands.

"All set! A dollar you don't face up the ace at first try!"

She laughed, bantering.

"Oh, Bob! You're too easy. I wonder you aren't broke. You're no monte-spieler. Is this your best?"

And I believed that I myself knew which card was the ace.

"You hear me, and there's my dollar."

He coolly waited.

"Not yours—ours. Will you make it five?"

"One is my limit on this throw. You named it."

"Oho!"

With a dart of her hand she had turned up the middle card, exposing the ace, as I had anticipated. She swept the two dollars to her.

"*Adios!*" she said.

He smiled indulgently.

"So soon? Don't I get my revenge? You, sir." And he appealed to me. "You see how easy it is. I'll throw you a turn for a dollar, two dollars, five dollars—anything to combine business and pleasure. Whether I win or lose I don't care. You'll follow the lead of the lady—what?"

I was on fire to accept the challenge, but she stayed me.

"Not now. I'm showing him around, Bob. You'll get your revenge later. Good-by. I've drummed up trade for you."

As if inspired by the winning, several of the bystanders, some newly arrived, had money in their hands to stake. We strolled on; and I was conscious that the youth's brown eyes briefly flicked after us with a peculiar glint.

"Yours," she said, extending the coins to me.

I declined.

"No, indeed. It is part of my tuition. If you will play, I will stake."

She also declined.

"I can't have that. You will at least take your own money back."

"Only for another try, madam," I conditionally assented.

"In that case we'll find a livelier game yonder," said she. "Bob's just a lazy boy.

His game is a piker game. He's too slow to learn from. Let us watch a real game!"

VIII

JIM had disappeared; but when we made our way to another monte table there he was, his hands in his pockets, his cigar half smoked.

More of a crowd was here, and the voice of the spieler was more insistent, yet low-pitched and businesslike. He was a study—a square-shouldered, well-set-up, wiry man of olive complexion. He had finely chiseled features, save for a nose somewhat cruelly beaked, with a short black mustache, long, wavy, dead-black hair, and, placed boldly wide, hard gray eyes that lent an atmosphere of coldness to his face. His hat was pulled down over his forehead, and he held an unlighted cigar between his teeth while he mechanically shifted the three cards—a diamond flashing from a finger—upon his little baize-covered table.

Money had been wagered. He had just raked in a few gains, adding them to his pile. His monotone droned on.

"Next, ladies and gentlemen! Sometimes I win, sometimes I lose. That is my business. The play is yours. You may think I have two chances to your one; that is not so. You make the choice. Always the queen, always the queen. You have only to watch the queen—one card; I have to watch three cards. You have your two eyes; I have my two hands. You spot the card only when you think you can; I meet all comers. It is an even gamble."

Jim remarked us as we approached.

"How you comin' now?" he greeted me.

"We won a dollar," my lady responded.

"Not I. She did the choosing," I corrected her.

"But you would have chosen the same card, you said," she prompted. "You saw how easy it was."

"Easy if you know how," Jim asserted. "Think to stake a leetle here? I've been keepin' cases, and luck's breaking ag'in' the bank to-night, by gosh! Made several turns myself already."

"We'll wait a minute till we get his system," she answered.

"Are you watching, ladies and gentlemen?" bade the dealer, in that even tone. "You see the eight of clubs, the eight of spades, the queen of hearts. The queen is your card. My hand against your eyes, then! You are set? There you are. Pick the queen, some one of you. Put your money on the queen of hearts. You can turn the card yourself. What, nobody? Don't be pikers! Let us have a little sport. Stake a dollar. Why, you'd toss a dollar down your throat—you'd lay a dollar on a cockroach race—you'd bet that much on a yellow dog if you owned him, just to show your spirit; and here I'm offering you a straight proposition."

With a muttered "I'll go you another turn, mister," Jim stepped closer and planked down a dollar.

The dealer cast a look up at him, as with pleased surprise.

"You, sir? Very good! You have spirit. Money talks. Here is my dollar. Now, to prove to these other people what a good guesser you are, which is the queen?"

"Here," Jim said confidently.

Sure enough, he faced up the queen of hearts.

"The money's yours. You never earned a dollar quicker, I'll wager, friend," the dealer acknowledged imperturbably. Evidently he was one who never evinced the least emotion, whether he won or lost. "Very good! Now—"

From behind him a man—a newcomer to the spot, who looked like any respectable Eastern merchant, being well-dressed and grave of face—touched him upon the shoulder. He turned his ear, and they whispered together.

At that moment I saw an arm steal swiftly forward at my side, and a thumb and finger slightly bend up the extreme corner of one of the cards—the queen. The hand and arm vanished; and when the dealer fronted us again the queen was apparently just as before. Only we who had seen would have marked the bent corner. The act had been so clever and so audacious that I fairly held my breath.

The gambler resumed his flow of talk, while he fingered the cards as if totally unaware that one of them had been tampered with.

"Now, again, ladies and gentlemen! You see how it is done. You back your eyes, and you win. I find that I shall have to close early to-night. Make your hay while the sun shines. Who'll be in on this turn? Watch the queen of hearts. I place her here. I coax the three cards a little." He gave a swift flourish. "There they are!"

His audience hesitated, as if fearful of a trick, for the bent corner of the queen, slightly raising the nearer end of the card, was plain to us who knew.

"I'll go you another, mister," Jim responded. "I'll pick out the queen agin for a dollar."

The gambler smiled grimly and shrugged his shoulders.

"Oh, pshaw, sir! These are small stakes. You'll never get rich at that rate, and neither shall I."

"I reckon I can set my own limit," Jim grumbled.

"Yes, sir; but let's have action! Who'll join this gentleman in his guess? Who'll back his luck? He's a winner, I admit that."

The gray eyes dwelt upon face after face in our half-circle. I hesitated, although my dollar was burning a hole in my pocket.

My lady whispered to me.

"All's fair in love and war. Here—put this on, with yours, for me."

She slipped a dollar of her own into my hand.

Another man stepped forward. He was, I judged, a teamster. His clothes—flannel shirt, belted trousers and six-shooter, and dusty boots—so indicated. His beard was shaggy and unkempt, almost covering his face underneath his drooping slouch hat.

"I'll stake you a dollar," he said.

"Two from me!" I heard myself saying, and I saw my hand depositing them.

"You're all on this gentleman's card, remember?"

We nodded. The bearded man tipped me a wink.

"You, sir, then, turn the queen if you can," the gambler challenged Jim.

With a quick movement Jim flopped the bent-corner card, and the queen herself seemed to wink jovially at us.

"Gentlemen, you've skinned me again!" the gambler said, scarcely varying his level tone, despite the chuckles of the crowd. "I'm clumsy to-night. I'd better quit! You must let me try once more; but I warn you, I want action. I'm willing to meet any sum you stack up against me, if it's large enough to spell action. Shall we go another round or two before I close up?"

He gathered the three cards.

"You see the queen—my unlucky queen of hearts. Here she is!"

He placed the card between thumb and finger.

"Here are the other two."

He held them up in his left hand—the eight of clubs, the eight of spades. He transferred them—with his rapid motion he strewed the three.

"Now choose the queen. I put the game to you fair and square. There are the cards. Maybe you can read their backs. That's your privilege."

He fixed his eyes upon the teamster.

"You, sir—where's your money, half of which was mine?"

He glanced at Jim.

"And you, sir—you'll follow your luck?"

Lastly he surveyed me with a flash of steely bravado. "And you, young gentleman—you came in before. I dare you!"

The bent corner was more pronounced than ever, as if aggravated by the manipulations. It could not possibly be mistaken by the knowing. A sudden shame possessed me, a distaste for this crafty advantage to which I was stooping—an advantage gained not through my own wit, either, but through the dishonorable trick of another man.

"There's your half from me, if you want it," said Jim, slapping down two dollars. "This is my night to howl!"

The teamster backed him.

"I'm on the same card," said he.

And not to be outdone—urged, I thought, by a pluck at my sleeve—I boldly followed with my own two dollars, reasoning that I was warranted in partially recouping, for Benton owed me much.

The gambler laughed shortly. His gaze, cool and impertinent, took in all of us. He leaned back, defiant.

"Give a me a chance, gentlemen! I shall not proceed with the play for that picayune sum before me. This is my last deal, and I've been a loser. It's make or break. Who else will back that gentleman's luck? I've placed the cards the best I know how. Six or eight dollars is no money to me. It doesn't pay for floor-space. Is nobody else in? Come, come, let's have some sport! I dare you! This time is either my revenge or your good fortune. Come, play up, gentlemen! Don't be crabbers!"

He smiled sarcastically; his words stung.

"This isn't pussy-in-a-corner. It's a game of wits. You wouldn't bet unless you felt cocksure of winning. I'll give you one minute, gentlemen, before calling all bets off unless you make the pot worth while!"

The threat had effect. Nobody wished to let the marked card get away. That was not human nature. Bets rained in upon the table—bank-notes, silver half-dollars, the rarer dollar coins, and the common greenbacks. He met each wager, while he sat negligent, smiling and chewing his unlighted cigar.

"This is the last round, gentlemen," he reminded us. "Are you all in? You," he said, direct to me. "Are you in such short circumstances that you have no spunk? Why did you come here, sir, if not to win? Why, the stakes you play would not buy refreshment for the lady!"

That was too much. I threw scruples aside. He was there to win if he could, and I was hot, now, with the same design. I extracted my twenty-dollar note, and, deaf to a quickly breathed "The center card!" from my lady, I planked it down before him. She should know me for a man of decision!

"There, sir," said I. "I am betting twenty-two dollars in all, which is my limit to-night, that the queen is the right-end card as I stand."

I thought that I had him. Forthwith he straightened alertly, spoke tartly.

"The game is closed, gentlemen. Remember, you are wagering on the first turn. There are no splits in monte—not at this table. Our friend says the right-end card. You, sir"—he addressed Jim—"they are backing you. Which do you say is the queen? Lay your finger on her!"

Jim so did, with a stubby finger dirty under the nail.

"That is the card, is it? You are agreed?" He queried us, sweeping his cold gray eyes from face to face. "We'll have no crabbing!"

We nodded, intently eying the card, fearful yet, some of us, that it might be slipped away from us.

"You, sir, then!" He addressed me. "You are the heaviest bettor. Suppose you turn the card for yourself and those other gentlemen!"

I obediently reached for it. My hand trembled. There were sixty or seventy dollars upon the table, and my own contribution was my last cent. As I fumbled, I felt the strain of bodies pressing against mine, caught the odor of whisky in the breath of those about me, and heard a foolish laugh or two. Nevertheless, the silence seemed overpowering.

I turned the card—the card with the bent corner, of which I was as certain as of my own name; I faced it up, confidently, my capital already doubled; and amidst a burst of astonished cries I stared dumfounded. It was the eight of clubs!

My fingers left it as if it were a snake. It was the eight of clubs! Where I had seen, in fancy, the queen of hearts, there lay like a changeling the eight of clubs, with a corner bent as the only token of the transformation.

The crowd elbowed about me. With rapid movement the gambler raked in the bets—a slender hand flashed by me—turned the next card. The queen that was, after all.

The gambler darkened, gathering the pasteboards.

"We can't both win, gentlemen," he said in a passionless tone; "but I am willing to give you one more chance, from a new deck."

What the response was I did not know or care. My ears drummed confusedly. Seeing nothing, I pushed through into the open, painfully conscious that I was flat penniless, and that instead of having played the knave I had played the fool, for the queen of hearts.

The loss of twenty dollars or so might once have been a trivial matter to me. I had at times cast that sum away as vainly as Washington is said to have thrown a dollar across the Potomac; but here I had lost my all, whether large or small. Not only had I been bilked out of it—I had bilked myself out of it by sinking, in pretended smartness, below the level of a more artful dodger.

I heard my lady speaking beside me.

"I'm so sorry!" She laid her hand upon my sleeve. "You should have been content with small sums, or followed my lead. Next time—"

"There'll be no next time," I blurted. "I am cleaned out."

"You don't mean—"

"I was first robbed at the hotel—now here."

"No, no!" she cried. Jim sidled to us. "That was a bungle, Jim," she said.

He ruefully scratched his head.

"A wrong steer for once, I reckon. I warn't slick enough. Too much money on the table. But it looked like the card; I never took my eyes off'n it. We'll try agin, and switch to another layout. By thunder, I want revenge on this joint, and I mean to

get it!" He appealed to me. "So do you, don't you, pardner?"

As I turned away with mute, sickly denial, it seemed to me that I sensed a shifting of forms at the monte-table. I caught the words "You watch here a moment"; and close following, a slender white hand fell heavily upon my lady's shoulder. It whirled her about, to face the gambler. His smooth olive countenance was dark with a venom of rage incarnate that poisoned the air. His syllables crackled.

"You devil! I heard you, at the table! You meddle with my come-ons, will you?" He slapped her with open palm, so that the impact smacked. "Now get out o' here, or I'll kill you!"

She flamed red, all in a single rush of blood.

"Oh!" she breathed.

Her hand darted for the pocket in her skirt, but I sprang between the two. Forgetful of my revolver, remembering only what I had witnessed—a woman struck by a man—with a blow I sent him reeling backward.

He recovered. His hat had fallen off. Every vestige of color had left his face, except for the spot where I had landed. His gray eyes, contrasted with his black hair, fastened upon my eyes almost deliberately, and his upper lip lifted over set white teeth. With lightning movement he thrust the fingers of his right hand into his waistcoat pocket.

I heard rush of feet, a clamor of voices; and all the while, which seemed interminable, I was tugging, awkward in my deadly peril, at my revolver. His fingers had whipped free of his pocket, and I glimpsed as with second sight—for my eyes were held strongly by his—the twin little black muzzles of a derringer concealed in his palm.

A spasm of fear pierced me. The gambler's gun spurted with ringing report, but just at the instant a flanneled arm knocked his hand up, the ball sped ceilingward, and the teamster of the gaming-table stood against him, with a revolver barrel boring into his very stomach.

"Stand pat, mister! I call you!"

In a trice all sign of unpleasant emotion vanished from my antagonist's handsome face, leaving it like a cameo, olive-tinted and inert. He steadied himself and smiled, surveying the teamster's visage, close to his.

"You have me covered, sir. My hand is in the discard." He composedly tucked the derringer back into his waistcoat pocket. "That gentleman struck me, he was about to draw on me, and by rights I might have killed him. My apologies for this little disturbance."

He bestowed a challenging look upon me, and a hard, unforgiving look upon the lady. With a bow he turned for his hat, and, stepping swiftly, went back to his table.

Now in the reaction I fought desperately against a trembling of the knees. There were congratulations; a confusing hubbub of voices assailed me. The teamster put his arm through mine and proffered a bluff invitation:

"Come and have a drink!"

"But you'll return? You must! I want to speak with you."

It was my lady, pleading earnestly. I still could scarcely utter a word; my brain was in a whirl. My new friend moved me away from her, and answered for me.

"Not until we've had a little confab, lady. We've got matters of importance jest at present!"

I saw her bite her lips, as she helplessly flushed. Her blue eyes implored me; but I had no will of my own, and I certainly owed a measure of courtesy to this man who had saved my life.

(To be continued in the October number of MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE*)*

SOLITUDE

LIVES so reserved they never find
Affinity of heart or mind,
So self-absorbed with tongue or pen
That they exclude their fellow men,
Become like Crusoe on his isle—
Too introspective for a smile.

Hamilton Williams

The Dead Man's Thoughts

A TALE OF LOVE AND HATE, OF PHILOSOPHY AND REVENGE

By William Merriam Rouse

PHYLLIS, as delicate as one of her own water-colors, was sewing by the fireplace when the knock sounded. Norman Lorain, his forty-inch chest indented by the table edge, was working upon the thesis for his doctor's degree in philosophy. He groaned, took off his eye-shade, pawed helplessly at the brown brush to which he kept his hair reduced, and managed a degree of calm. When a man is wrestling with the "Critique of Pure Reason" he does not like knocks upon the door.

"Come in!" he called, not unpleasantly.

It would be the laundry boy, or the janitor with a perfectly foolish errand. But it was not.

The door opened. The shadow of Dr. Jacob Tyrrell, who stood just outside with his back against the hall light, fell across the threshold. There was no mistaking the graceful outlines of that strong and slender form, of that shapely head. There was only one Jacob Tyrrell, distinguished physicist, dilettante in painting and floriculture, traveler, writer. In times of despondency Norman Lorain's best medicine was the thought that he had been able to marry Phyllis when Tyrrell wanted her.

It was perhaps five seconds before the two in the room recovered from their astonishment. They had not seen Dr. Tyrrell since May, when they had been married, and this was July. Supposedly he had taken himself away permanently, leaving the memory of a gleaming smile and a mass of roses that would have paid their rent for a quarter. He had done it like a gentleman.

"Well!" cried Lorain, springing up. He hurried across the room, Phyllis beside him, with his hand outstretched. "This is as pleasant as it is unexpected, doctor!"

Of course Norman Lorain was not a liar. His involuntary exclamation was ninety-five per cent true, for in pre-courtship days he had benefited more than a little from his intellectual contact with the doctor of science. Physics does not halt at the borderland of metaphysics. Something like this was now in the mind of the younger man.

Dr. Tyrrell stepped over the threshold and smiled. The same smile—the full lips curving agreeably above the short, pointed beard. A touch of asceticism in the lean face—a demand for admiration by the high, fine forehead, which disappeared under waving dark hair.

The doctor's eyes crinkled pleasantly; only within the eyes themselves was there the slightest reason for the reserve which Lorain always felt dimly in the presence of Dr. Tyrrell. His eyes were of an impenetrable black, like globules of ink that has stood long in the bottle and become thick and muddy.

"Sit down in our big chair!" exclaimed Phyllis, radiant with the soft welcome which made the Lorains' two rooms more popular than was quite good for a student of philosophy. "Our honored guests always have this big fat one, in front of the fire, and we sit one on each side!"

Tyrrell stood for a moment, still in silence, holding a hand of each of them in his firm, warm grip. In that moment his glance swept their faces, the harmonious shabbiness of the room, Lorain's book-piled table, and the seamstress work which Phyllis was of necessity doing for herself. Lorain knew, as well as if he had read it in ten-point type, that the doctor's trained eye and brain observed everything and interpreted everything.

"My friends," he said, after just that little instant of dramatic pause, "I felt sure of this welcome — or I should not have come!"

"Always!" Lorain assured him, very heartily, and with a sincere feeling of shame

at his instinctive inner withdrawal. The amœba, that sapient micro-organism, retreats from a foreign substance; man, drugged by too much thinking, denies his own wisdom.

"Of course!" echoed Phyllis.

With her unhurried, swift, graceful movements she made Dr. Tyrrell comfortable. An ash-tray, the lamp-shade tilted so that there were no direct rays upon his face, a little stool at the edge of hearth for his feet. Lorain added a precious stick of wood to the fire. Light gleamed from the pale gold of Phyllis's hair and from the brown depths of her eyes; it touched her pale hands with ruddiness.

"It isn't necessary to speculate as to your happiness. The ether perceptibly vibrates with it!"

Dr. Tyrrell's rich, well-modulated voice carried a trace of sadness. There was even a trace of melancholy in his carriage, the more noticeable because of the general faultlessness of his appearance. From dinner-coat to pumps he was quiet perfection.

He contrasted markedly with Lorain, who, oozing happiness, sat in his shirt-sleeves sucking a pipe. In the throes of composition his cravat had started toward one ear, and he had not as yet discovered it. His sleeves bulged over muscles that forbade him the economy of ready-made clothes. A careless observer would have placed him vocationally as a stevedore rather than as an embryonic metaphysician.

"We are happy," said Phyllis, almost solemnly.

"We grow happy in geometrical ratio. To-morrow will be to-day squared," added Lorain, with a grin.

"As a variable approaches its limit?" suggested Dr. Tyrrell softly, with a sidewise glance from the fire toward the face of Phyllis Lorain.

"Neither one of you knows what he is talking about," she smiled, with the consciousness of a conviction. "Of the two, however, Norman is nearer the truth."

Her husband's grin deepened, but Dr. Tyrrell stirred with a quick interest. He half turned in his chair.

"Now just what do you mean by that?" he asked.

"I mean that happiness is all there is. Either it doesn't exist at all, or else it is complete and perfect. Is happiness a turnip, that it has to grow? Dear me, you men do know so much that isn't so!"

"Intuitive knowledge — *a priori!*" laughed Lorain. "Evil is as real as good, Phyllis!"

She sighed and shook her head. Dr. Tyrrell spoke thoughtfully, with measured words.

"We deal with the partial," he said, "both in physics and metaphysics. The partial is tremendously real. It is all the reality we experience. As, for instance, death—and hate!"

"Quite so. If you were not right, I should have to throw away my thesis," agreed Lorain. "But Phyllis and I are going to consider death only as a theory, for at least fifty years."

"That's as it should be!" Dr. Tyrrell nodded his approval. "Youth—love—life! Quite right. As a physicist, however, whose work is his life and his love, I am interested in death. I'm inclined to think—"

Lorain waited expectantly, but the doctor did not continue. Whatever Dr. Jacob Tyrrell might think about death had for him a profound professional interest; and so, after a moment, he broke the silence.

"You were saying?"

"I have formulated a hypothesis," replied the doctor, without continuing the sentence which he had broken. "An ethereal hypothesis which I am seeking to establish experimentally. If I am successful, Lorain, it will make a considerable difference in your thinking. The text-books will be rewritten."

"H-m!" ejaculated Lorain. "You mean, I assume from talks we have had in the past, that you will be able to revive and establish the materialistic conception, or something like it?"

"Something like it. Yes, I shall be able to demonstrate in the laboratory exactly what 'stuff dreams are made of,' and the minds that dream them, and the bodies that carry the minds."

"Never in the laboratory!" exclaimed Phyllis, with an emphatic shake of her head.

Dr. Tyrrell smiled indulgently. Norman Lorain was thoughtful, having great respect for the powers of the man who was his guest.

"Until you succeed I shall stand by the idealistic position," he said at length. "I am building my thesis almost wholly upon Hegel—and Kant, of course. Even Huxley said: 'The more completely the ma-

terialistic position is admitted, the easier it is to show that the idealistic position is unassailable, if the idealist confines himself within the limits of positive knowledge.'"

Dr. Tyrrell lighted a cigarette, still with an enigmatic smile upon his lips, and blew a ring of fragrant smoke.

"And Spencer said," he replied, "that 'no thought, no feeling, is ever manifested save as the result of physical force. This principle will before long be a scientific commonplace.'"

"And here we are, at a deadlock!" laughed Lorain.

"As always," added Phyllis.

Dr. Tyrrell shrugged.

"Anyhow, I'm going to be delightfully occupied for the next few months. I shall shut myself up at home, with no one but my servant Jacques, and I shall not come out until the thing is done."

"You will ruin your health!" from Phyllis.

"If my experiments succeed, I shall find a way to restore health," replied the doctor. "If they don't—ah, well!"

Lorain was himself too much the student to protest. Had his work made such a course necessary, he would undoubtedly have followed it.

However, he did picture what would have been for him a life of painful solitude. Both he and Phyllis were well acquainted with the doctor's old house, hidden away near Washington Square in the depths of an almost forgotten street. Once undoubtedly a respected mansion, it now presented, on the outside, a solitary and neglected appearance. Within, the doctor had succeeded in creating comfort, if not luxury. Nevertheless, it was not a cheerful place; nor did the soft-footed presence of Jacques, a pale, stooped man of indeterminate years, who seldom spoke, lighten the gray atmosphere. He was the only servant.

"Then we won't have the pleasure of seeing you again soon?" asked Lorain, somewhat at a loss as to just what he should say.

"No!" Dr. Tyrrell threw away his cigarette and rose abruptly. "Perhaps I shouldn't have come in upon you unexpectedly like this to-night; but—well, I wanted to glimpse your happiness, my friends, before I began my labors. Even with my love for pure science it will be a strain, I assure you."

"But why must you become a hermit?" cried Phyllis, her sympathies instantly touched. "Break your seclusion when you feel tired. Come and see us!"

"I wish I could!" He shook his head, smiling. "Lorain will understand, I think. A train of thought must not be broken. Moreover, there will be times, perhaps the times of greatest fatigue and strain, when I cannot leave my laboratory even to eat and sleep. But Jacques knows how to take care of me. He will see to my physical needs admirably."

He walked toward the door, turned, and faced them. His ink-like eyes swept from Lorain to Phyllis, and rested upon her face.

"Be happy," he said. "You two have what you want—now!"

The door closed behind him.

II

INSTINCTIVELY Lorain's strong arms were extended toward his wife, and she found a refuge in them.

"He depresses me," murmured Lorain, as he avoided the chair that the doctor had occupied and drew her down beside him upon the hearth-rug.

"I feel sorry for him!" she said. "Terribly sorry for him!"

"Yes—he lost you!"

"It isn't that, Norman. The things he thinks and feels make me sorry for him. I don't know just what they are, but they make me ache!"

No more work was done that evening in post-Kantian metaphysics. No man of thirty, not even a philosopher, would have preferred a consideration of the Hegelian ultimate idea to Phyllis Lorain. It was not infrequently thus in those two glorified furnished rooms, and Lorain found, somewhat to the surprise of his intellectual self, that his progress in his work was more sure and swift for just such lapses.

Except for the pinch of an exceedingly real poverty, nothing marred the joy of their days. An infinitesimal income, the sale of Phyllis's water-colors, and occasional learned articles by Lorain kept them going toward that desired day when he should receive his degree. They had the coming winter to go through with. The following autumn Norman Lorain, Ph.D., had been promised an assistant professorship. It was the winter before the conferring of the degree that worried them.

Into this situation came, one September morning, a long envelope of excellent bond

with "Waring & Deadham, Attorneys-at-Law," engraved in one corner. Lorain knew the firm to be one of solid reputation in the financial district. Inasmuch as he had no rich relatives and no debts, he was blank to any feeling save that of curiosity until he had glanced over the single sheet of paper that accompanied the enclosure—a smaller envelope, unmarked and unsealed.

The body of the letter from the lawyers was:

This will inform you of the death and subsequent burial of Dr. Jacob Tyrrell, whose executors we have the honor to be. You would have been notified before the funeral had it not been Dr. Tyrrell's urgent request that there should be no one present except his old servant, Jacques Painchaud. It was in accord with his wishes that many arrangements have been left in the hands of Painchaud.

It is also in accord with the last will of Dr. Tyrrell that the enclosed letter is handed you herewith. We are, of course, familiar with the contents, and our late client's intent will be carried out scrupulously. If, however, you should not care to avail yourself of the bequest, or if you should wish to discuss the matter, we shall be at your service.

Lorain read this standing in front of his table. He restrained an impulse to speak to Phyllis—who was busy obliterating the evidence that the studio was also their dining-room—and drew forth the letter from the inner envelope. It was in the hand of Jacob Tyrrell, and ran thus:

My dear Friends:

When a man knows that he stands in the presence of death, he speaks frankly. Therefore be patient with the whim of one who feels himself not only suddenly old, but about to experience the termination of his existence. Although I may have appeared to be in good health, I thought I was upon the threshold when I called upon you. Now I know that I shall not live to finish the experiments which I hoped would give me a certain degree of immortality.

It is largely because of this failure to realize my ambition that I am writing to you. Man desires immortality. Some die in a foolish belief in personal persistence as a conscious entity, some find continuation in their children, and I had hoped to go on in my work. That is now impossible. Therefore I am appealing to you to give me a little brief "immortality"; and the knowledge that you will do it eases the disappointment of my last few days. I shall be remembered for a time, at least.

I could not leave you my fortune. To do so would be to place your devotion to each other under the shadow of an obligation to one who once hoped to marry Phyllis Ballantrye. However, by repaying you for the service which you will do me I can be of some use to you. What obligation there is will be mine.

Will you take my house just as it stands, and use it as long as you choose? All I ask in return for this is that Mrs. Lorain will every day place fresh roses in my study, on the desk at which I worked and dreamed for so many years. Jacques will remain in the house and serve you in all things. He will provide roses. He, even better than you, knows how I loved them.

When the house has ceased to be of service to you, or when you tire of the obligation, you may leave, be the time long or short. Jacques will then notify the attorneys. He is well provided for, and he has always had my most complete confidence. A remarkable man, Jacques, and I will ask you to respect his little and wholly harmless idiosyncrasies.

I have guessed that the use of my house at this time will be of some service to you. I sincerely hope so. My last word of advice to you is that you should enjoy your happiness.

Your friend,

Jacob Tyrrell.

When Norman Lorain looked up from the reading of this remarkable epistle, he found that Phyllis was regarding him in puzzled silence.

"This," she said, "is the first time since I have known you that I have not been able to tell from your face whether the news was good or bad."

As she spoke, he saw an aspect of the affair which had not at first occurred to him. However mixed might be his feelings in regard to Dr. Tyrrell's offer, it was certain that their winter would be relieved of financial strain. House rent alone was enough to turn the balance.

"Read these letters," he replied, "and tell me whether the news is good or bad."

It seemed that she took forever about it. Her eyes were wet when finally she lifted them from the doctor's letter.

"Now I know why I was so sorry for that man when he was here," she said. "It must have been terrible for him! He was alone—in his mind."

"In his mind," agreed Lorain. "He thought of us. Well, there'll be no difficulty about the winter now."

"No."

"You don't seem pleased at what he has done for us, Phyllis. We should be grateful. He has proved a friend in need."

"Yes."

Nevertheless she was not buoyant at the prospect of moving; neither then nor during the interval while they were making their small arrangements to occupy the house of Dr. Jacob Tyrrell.

III

It was a dull, gray afternoon when they went with their trunks and books and pic-

tures to the shabby mansion and were welcomed by Jacques Painchaud in the somber hallway.

In spite of Dr. Tyrrell's teakwood and mahogany, in spite of his paintings and his rare rugs, the old house retained its atmosphere of being a tomb in which the dead sixties were buried. Jacques fitted well into this setting. From his appearance he might have been no older than his late master, or he might have been ten years older. His hair was slightly gray, his shoulders stooped, and his face pallid and lined. He was one of those men who seem to have been old always; but this appearance might have come from a life spent largely indoors. Certainly there was a resilient strength in his movements and fire in his black eyes.

Most of all were his eyes alive. Lorain remembered having thought, at his first sight of Jacques, that so far as eyes were concerned he might have been brother to his employer. In all other ways he was Tyrrell's antithesis.

"The guest-chamber is ready," announced Jacques, with his decided French accent. "The roses are also ready to be placed in the study, at the pleasure of *madame;* and I am always at the service of *monsieur* and *madame.*"

He served them a simple but perfect dinner that evening—a dinner which he himself had cooked. Phyllis learned, upon questioning, that Dr. Tyrrell had made provision for every expense connected with the household during their stay. The Lorains were to take no thought at all, except for their personal affairs—and the roses.

Jacques mentioned Dr. Tyrrell's favorite flowers again; and when he served coffee in the library he brought in a tall silver vase with half a dozen magnificent yellow roses nodding upon tall stems. Only in the matter of the roses did he let them see that he had a thought other than for their comfort.

"We might as well take them to the study now," said Lorain, reluctantly getting up before his after-dinner cigar was finished.

He had rarely had the pleasure of such cigars as Dr. Tyrrell had left for his use.

"*Monsieur* will go with *madame?*" asked Jacques, hovering apologetically near the door.

"Oh, this time," Lorain answered carelessly. "Ordinarily she'll attend to the roses in the morning, no doubt, while I'm working."

"Yes," Phyllis said. "He would like it that way, I think—fresh flowers every morning."

Jacques led the way, although they could have found it without him. His presence was explained, however, when he took two keys from his pocket and gave one of them to Phyllis.

"There is a spring lock on the door," he explained. "I will keep one key, with your permission, for such cleaning as must be done. You may not know, *madame,* that *monsieur le professeur* had this room made sound-proof. It was here that he did his thinking for the experiments in the basement laboratory. That room is cleaned bare now, according to his orders, but the study is left just as he used it. I am to attend to the selling of the house when *monsieur* and *madame* have done with it, which I hope will not be soon."

Then, with a bow and a rather tremulous "*Voilà,*" Jacques opened the door and stepped aside. Norman Lorain and his wife crossed the threshold together.

Whatever impression of melancholy Jacques had created was dissipated as he switched on the lights. The room was somewhat peculiar, but in no sense weird or forbidding. It was of medium size, square, and with the light from out of doors admitted only by a broad window near the high ceiling. The furniture was a mixture of periods, and had evidently been chosen for reasons of sentiment and comfort rather than artistic effect.

In two corners of the room were convex cabinets of eighteenth-century workmanship. There was an easy chair, such as the Lorains themselves might have selected, and a few cases of books. The desk at which Dr. Tyrrell had worked was a severely utilitarian and modern piece of furniture. Upon it were placed morocco-bound copies of the few monographs he had published. It was here that the roses were to stand.

Phyllis set the vase down and touched the petals of the flowers with a light caress. She leaned forward and drew in a deep breath of their fragrance.

"It is a good thought," she said, "to be remembered this way; but I feel unutterably sad!"

Lorain took his wife by the hand and led her out of the room. He heard Jacques, as they went down the corridor, snapping out the lights and closing the door of the

study. Phyllis's eyes glistened with unshed tears.

"You must not take this so seriously," said Lorain, frowning. "We're both sorry for Tyrrell, of course, and I fancy I feel somewhat as you do; but you must not let it affect you, or I shall be sorry we took the house."

"Oh, no!" cried Phyllis. She managed to smile at him. "Think how it makes everything sure for you! No worry this winter—money enough saved to go through the summer! I'll promise to smile hereafter when I take in the doctor's flowers; but I do wish the window were lower, so that I could get a bit of brightness into the room."

Lorain said no more. It was true that they could consider themselves extremely fortunate. It was folly to think that there was any cause for depression. They convinced themselves of this that evening in the library; so that by the time they went up to the guest-chamber they were again the gay Lorains whose friends found them a spiritual tonic.

IV

THE next day Norman Lorain resumed his interrupted work, and thereafter through the better part of every day he was occupied with reading, writing, and research. Tyrrell's books frequently saved him trips to the libraries, and gradually he found himself revolving within a small circle of life. Absorbed in his work, and completely satisfied with the companionship of Phyllis, it was not until they had been in Dr. Tyrrell's house for nearly two months that he awoke to the seclusion of their lives.

He had left the little room which he used for working, and had gone down to the library after a book. The door was standing open, and he entered silently—to see Phyllis bent over the arm of a big chair, her pale, gleaming hair disheveled and her shoulders heaving to the impulse of half-stifled sobs.

He leaped across the room and knelt beside her. For minutes she clung to him like a tired and frightened child, content to rest without making any explanation of her trouble.

"What is it, dear?" he asked softly, after a long time. "I must know, and at once!"

"I don't know how to tell you," she replied, lifting her head and letting her deep eyes meet his frankly. "I really don't understand why, but I have been so depressed that at times it has seemed unbearable. Norman, there's something queer about this house!"

"Nonsense!" He smiled and frowned at the same time. "There's nothing queer about the house except Jacques, and the impress of Dr. Tyrrell's peculiar personality. It's merely what one would call atmosphere, that's all. Why, I felt it slightly the first night we were here; but it passed."

She shook her head and sighed.

"It isn't natural for me to be depressed. There's every reason why I should be happy, and I am happy—the happiest woman in the world!"

Lorain kissed her.

"You need more gaiety," he said. "Do you know that we haven't been to the theater in a month? Or heard any music? And it seems to me that the people we know aren't coming around as they used to. It's because we don't get out to see them. That's it! We must amuse ourselves, Phyllis!"

For answer she rose, walked over to the library table, and picked up a handful of roses. While they were not dried and brown, they were completely withered, dead. The petals dropped away as she lifted them.

"Look!" she said. "I put these roses up-stairs yesterday, and this morning I found them like this!"

"What?" exclaimed Lorain, springing up. "You must have forgotten to fill the vase with fresh water."

"No." She pointed to the stems. "You can see that there was plenty of water, and it was fresh. The roses have been like this every day."

"Every day?" echoed Lorain stupidly. "The windows—"

"The window opens for ventilation. That is, some panes of it can be opened like a transom."

"Are the roses fresh when Jacques gets them?"

"Always."

"Have you spoken to him about it?"

"A long time ago. He was evasive. I think he believes in ghosts—that Dr. Tyrrell takes their freshness, or something like that."

"Tommyrot!" snapped Lorain.

He looked up to see Jacques standing in

the doorway. The man's black eyes were fixed steadily upon him.

"Jacques," said Lorain, rather glad than otherwise that the servant had appeared, "what do you make of these roses?"

"*Monsieur* means as to why they fade overnight?"

"Yes."

"There are things we do not understand. *Monsieur le docteur* was very fond of roses."

"Jacques, do you believe in spirits?"

"I believe in many things that M. Lorain does not believe in," replied Painchaud, with a bow.

On the whole, the reply gave the effect of an affirmative. Lorain's shoulders took a belligerent set.

"Come on, Phyllis!" he said. "I'm going to look that study over for spirits!"

He went up the stairs two at a time. Few things roused him to anger more quickly than an expressed belief in the supernatural. He had, however, to wait outside the study door until Phyllis arrived with the key. He noticed that her fingers were icy as he took it from her.

The room was just as when he had last seen it, except that it was more cheerful in the daytime. At this hour blocks of sunlight fell from the high window and traveled a slow path over the thick rug. The roses which Phyllis had placed upon the table that morning were still fresh.

He fastened open the door, which swung upon powerful spring hinges, and began a systematic investigation. Out of the corner of his eye he saw that Jacques was behind Phyllis, just outside the door.

Lorain went first to the corner cabinets, and found them empty. The doors, which were paneled instead of being set with glass, stood half-open. The drawers of the desk were empty. He moved a few books, tapped the walls here and there, and turned up one side of the rug. The window, as he found after he had had Jacques bring a step-ladder so that he could reach it, was solid, save for the panes that opened to give air.

Altogether the room had every appearance of wholesomeness, and the only possible means for the ingress or egress of a human being was through the doorway.

"*Monsieur* has found nothing!" said Jacques, with a faint hint of triumph in his voice, when Lorain had returned to the corridor.

"No, because there's nothing to find," replied Lorain sharply. "It's remarkable that the roses fade so quickly, but there must be a physical explanation for it."

The Lorains went back to the library, while Jacques melted away to his own pursuits. Norman Lorain faced his wife with the sudden realization that he had caught something of her depression. He saw that faint lines had appeared upon her face, especially above the corners of her mouth.

"We must take hold of ourselves, Phyllis," he said, almost sternly. "You, particularly. There's nothing to fear, in reality; but we'll leave the house to-day, if you wish. Of course we can't stay without attending to the flowers. I'm not sure that it wouldn't be better to go this very minute."

"Oh, Norman!" she cried. "I wouldn't think of such a thing! You know what this winter means to us. It's absurd that some faded roses and a fit of the blues should endanger your success—our success. I won't have it!"

Lorain was turned by her renewed courage. After all, it did seem foolish to flee from nothing. Moreover, his wife's depression was within herself, a psychological condition, and therefore she would take it with her, he argued. He put his arms around her tenderly.

"We're going out into the sunlight to-day," he said. "To-night we dine out, and see a play, and take supper afterward. I've declared war on the blues!"

The diversions of the day and evening seemed to banish Phyllis's depression; yet Norman, watching her closely, caught moments when her eyes looked but did not see, and when the delicate tracings at the mouth corners showed under the electric lights. He was more disturbed than he cared to admit to himself.

After breakfast the next morning he delayed going to work until Jacques came into the library with the roses. Then Lorain went with his wife to the study. He noticed that Jacques followed them at a respectful distance.

She unlocked the door, fastened the door back, and entered. The roses on the desk were withered and dropping petals. Phyllis lifted them out, carried the vase to the nearest bath-room, refilled it with fresh water, went back to the study, arranged the fresh flowers, picked up the old ones, and left the room.

She had not been there altogether more than five minutes, and yet Lorain saw that after she had finished her small task the radiance of her personality was extinguished. Her steps dragged upon the stairs. He saw her shoulders lift to a sigh. He himself felt a strange sense of impending evil.

Jacques had disappeared—Lorain did not know just when. Suddenly, without reasoning, he determined to watch the servant. There seemed to be a connection between Phyllis's depression and the room—between the room and Jacques.

Until the dull boom of the luncheon gong reached the library, Phyllis Lorain sat before the smoldering fire, her slender arms hanging listlessly and her head bent. Although she talked quite naturally to Norman, nothing that he could say, no reasoning that he could bring to bear upon her mind, served to restore her to normal good spirits.

She admitted, now, that each morning lately she had had to fight off just such a fit of depression following her visit to the study. The power of the attacks had been increasing, but she had not wanted to trouble him. This morning's wave of mental darkness was heavier than any of those which had gone before.

With the meal Phyllis became more or less herself. Now, however, Lorain was fully aroused to danger. If she had not gently but firmly ridiculed him, he would have insisted upon leaving for a hotel that afternoon, regardless of consequences to his future.

He finally compromised by letting himself be persuaded to hold on for a few days longer. It was impossible that there was anything that could not be found out and overcome. It was incredible that there should be anything at all. He wanted to investigate—and he did not forget his determination to pay some very close attention to Jacques.

V

THAT night, after Lorain had gone through all the motions of retiring, even to putting out the lights in their room and getting into bed, he slipped softly to the floor again and put on shirt and trousers over his pajamas. He had previously pocketed a flash-light and a small automatic pistol. Earlier he had told Phyllis of his intention, so that she lay silent, if anxious, while he padded in felt slippers to the door and carefully opened it.

The silent house was as it always was late in the evening. Dim lights burned here and there in the hallways, but there was no sound except the faint ticking of a clock.

Lorain had a central idea—to observe Jacques Painchaud in his own room when he did not know himself to be under observation. The servant's apartment was on the corridor with Dr. Tyrrell's study. Lorain knew the door, and he waited outside it until he was rewarded by the sound of movement from within.

He wished to make sure that Painchaud was there before he did what he had in mind; for, while it would be nothing extraordinary if he were found rambling about the house at night, it would arouse Jacques's suspicions if he discovered Lorain climbing up a fire-escape.

It was from the fire-escape that Lorain hoped to get a glimpse of the servant's room. He went out of a window on the floor below, and within a minute found himself in a position better than he had hoped.

Jacques's window-shade failed by about an inch to reach the sash. Lorain, therefore, by resting his chin upon the stone sill, could command a view of the little room. It was neat and severely plain, but it made some concessions to comfort in an easy chair and a small desk.

It was at the desk that Jacques sat now, with a tin cash-box in front of him and a white envelope in his hand. He seemed to be meditating. He turned the envelope slightly, and Lorain, a half-dozen feet away, read his own name written in the unmistakable hand of Dr. Tyrrell. He noticed, too, that the flap was unsealed.

For possibly half a minute Painchaud held the letter in his hand, considering it with impassive face; then he laid it in a drawer of the desk. The tin box he placed in a closet. Afterward, with a glance at his watch, he began to undress.

Lorain dropped down the fire-escape and went back, shivering, to his own room. In an instinctively guarded voice he told Phyllis what he had seen. Although he had not learned anything definite, he was satisfied now that there was something to learn, and that Jacques knew the solution.

They decided to go through the next day as usual. Lorain felt somewhat relieved now. He would get hold of the letter, if it

were still in the desk drawer, when Jacques went out to do his daily marketing.

The day began, as every other day had begun, with a perfect breakfast, served perfectly. Afterward Lorain went to his workroom as usual, and Phyllis waited in the library for Jacques to bring her the roses. The difference was that Lorain had no thought of working this morning.

He paced the floor until, at the end of fifteen minutes, Phyllis came in. Her eyes were shining with excitement, and she carried the fresh roses.

"He's gone out!" she exclaimed. "Now you can look for the letter while I'm in the study. Then come down to the library and tell me what it's all about!"

He walked rapidly along the corridor toward Painchaud's room. If he had found the door fastened, he would have used the fire-escape, possibly risking detection; but not altogether to his surprise the door yielded to a turn of the knob. Jacques evidently had no suspicion that he was suspected.

As Lorain entered the room, he heard Phyllis's key turn in the study door. He looked over his shoulder and met her smile of congratulation at his good luck.

He walked to the desk, opened the drawer, and found it empty except for the letter. This he took out, and his fingers trembled slightly as he raised the flap and drew forth some folded sheets. It was like a message from the dead, he thought, as he began to read the doctor's strong hand.

LORAIN:

When this letter is placed in your hands by Jacques Painchaud, the end for which I have given up everlasting fame and greater wealth than man ever had will have been accomplished. If it were not for the satisfaction of telling you that I, Jacob Tyrrell, have done what has been done, I could have both revenge and the reward of my great discovery. I prefer to have you know what brain it was that planned the blow, and what hand it was that struck.

When Phyllis Ballantrye married you, a hulking beef of beef-like intellect, I resolved to kill her as soon as I could do so with safety to myself, and to leave you to spend a lifetime without her. There could be no greater torture for you. Since the day of your wedding you have both been doomed. The call I made upon you one evening was for the purpose of learning your circumstances. It did not need observation as well-trained as mine to see that any financial aid which you could accept would be welcome.

I shaped your destinies. I got you here into this house through a double appeal to sentiment and to your need. Sentiment made it possible for you to accept the use of the house; sentiment and need operated together to bring Phyllis into the position that I desired.

Every time that Phyllis placed flowers upon my desk, she drew a little nearer to destruction.

Do you think I am mad? Read on, and you will appreciate my genius. You, having a certain familiarity with natural science, can understand me. Much of what I am about to say you know theoretically from the text-books. I know all of it experimentally, for I have mastered the whole material world!

To begin, the ether is the basis of all phenomena. All mass is of the ether. All momentum and all kinetic energy are of the ether. You will remember that the ethereal lines oscillate a trillion times, roughly, each second, to produce violet light. Very well! I have demonstrated that just as light and sound are transmitted by the ether, *so are thoughts!*

The thought of death has its own ethereal vibration. Hate also travels by vibration; and so on, *ad infinitum*. Given a human subject and a means of initiating the proper ethereal vibration, I knew that I could move the human being in any emotional direction. It remained only to perfect the proper instrument.

More than Marconi did for telegraphy I have done for the conscious transmission and direction at will of thoughts and emotions. When my instrument had been completed, and tested upon a living man, I died and made way for the fruition of my revenge. A step or two further in invention and I could have prevented my own death; but I turned even that to account.

Every time that Phyllis filled the silver vase with roses, she was subjected to the thought of suicidal despair. The effect was cumulative, and her brain was gradually harmonized to the death-despair thought. She absorbed emotional poison every day. The roses die quickly, for they have not the resistance of the human mind. They, like all flowers, flourish under the group of thoughts allied to love, and die under those allied to hate.

I could have concealed my apparatus in the guest-room, and after one night you would both have been dead of your own desire and act; but it was she whom I wished to destroy, and you whom I wished to keep alive. Hence I chose to use the study. Look behind the corner cabinets. They act in intensifying the vibrations, as does the sound-chamber of a phonograph.

I calculated nicely the amount of time that Phyllis would spend in the study each day. I know by experiment how long it takes to drive a human being to self-destruction through mechanically induced despair. From the total time of exposure I deducted an allowance for recuperation during each twenty-four-hour interval, taking into account the factors of youth, vitality, religious belief, and so forth. I venture to assert now that the date on which Jacques will deliver this letter of triumph to you will synchronize with the date I calculated mathematically in advance.

Phyllis now lies dead by her own hand, or Jacques would not have placed this letter in your hands and you would not now be reading it. He is far away, and so am I—farther and nearer than you know. Who is victor?

JACOB TYRRELL.

Norman Lorain finished reading. For a moment he found himself dizzy, nauseated. The letter crumpled in his hands. He tried

to think, but it was a matter of several seconds before he could clear his brain.

The danger to Phyllis was clear enough now, and his instinctive desire to leave the house was understandable; but because of the tenses in the letter he was both confused and gripped at the heart by a great fear. All through the assumption was that Phyllis was dead. It required an effort of will to comfort himself, as he stood there, with the remembrance that the letter had not yet been delivered. Jacques Painchaud had merely got it ready to deliver.

Could it be that this was the day?

The thought was like a knife-thrust. The sheets of the letter fluttered from his hand as he leaped for the door. He raced with time along the corridor, down the stairs, up to the door of the library.

He shook with sudden faintness as his fingers closed upon the knob. More than any conceivable experience he dreaded the next instant; yet he could not withhold his hand. The door swung open, and he stepped into the room.

Phyllis stood before the fire, swaying slightly. Her arms hung at her sides. Her eyes were fastened upon the library table, an arm's length from her. He followed her gaze, and saw that it rested upon his pistol, lying ready to be seized. She swayed toward it rhythmically, and then away from it, at intervals of two or three seconds. Alternately she yielded to the force of despair and overcame it.

As she swayed she spoke, in a voice low but vibrant with a power that seemed not of herself.

"'There shall no evil befall thee, neither shall any plague come nigh thy dwelling,'" she said. "'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil; for Thou art with me!'"

Two strides carried Lorain across the room. He snatched the weapon up and dropped it into his pocket. Then, with a cry struggling in his throat, he took her in his arms.

"You've come!" she whispered, and fainted.

Lorain carried her out of the room and out of the house.

VI

It was afternoon before Norman Lorain went back to the house of Dr. Jacob Tyrrell. He had left Phyllis in a family hotel with a nurse, and with the assurance of a physician that a few days of rest would restore her.

The door of Tyrrell's house opened, as usual, to Lorain's latch-key. When he stepped into the hallway, his right hand was in his coat pocket, gripping the butt of the pistol that had so nearly been the means of completing the doctor's evil work.

He went cautiously into the library. No sound of movement came from anywhere in the house. He rang for Jacques, facing the door as he waited. There was no answer, either to that or to a second and a third ring.

Lorain went up to the bedchamber that he and Phyllis had occupied. It was exactly as he had last seen it that morning. From there he walked slowly to the room of Jacques Painchaud. The door was ajar, and he could not remember whether he had left it so. He pushed it open. The sheets of the letter from Dr. Tyrrell were still scattered over the floor.

Lorain turned away with a strong desire to be out of the house. He fought that desire, for he had come to do a certain thing. He did not intend that the terrible instrument of destruction that Jacob Tyrrell had made should exist another day. Therefore he forced himself to the door of the doctor's study—to start back with a smothered cry of surprise.

A key was in the lock.

He drew his pistol and made sure that the safety catch was released. He turned the key with his left hand and set his shoulder against the door; then he pushed it open quickly and stepped into the room with his pistol leveled.

Lorain stopped as abruptly as he had entered, and stood like a man frozen. He heard the door swing shut with a click of the lock. His finger trembled against the trigger of his gun.

Not the mere fact that a man sat in the chair of Dr. Jacob Tyrrell momentarily unnerved Lorain—it was the man's appearance. The clothes, the touch of gray in the hair, the lined face, all said that it was Jacques Painchaud who faced him with unwinking, murky black eyes; but the bearing was not that of Painchaud. The shoulders were thrown back, a familiar smile lurked upon the lips. The man was stricken by some overpowering force against which he struggled.

"Tyrrell!" cried Lorain hoarsely.

"So she is dead?" said the man in the chair, without movement other than of eyes and lips.

"No!" growled Lorain, tightening his fingers upon the pistol. "You should have picked me. She was too strong for you!"

The figure in the chair moved convulsively. Life blazed up in the ghastly face.

"Liar!" said Tyrrell. "It was a mathematical certainty!"

"Tell me, where is Painchaud?" demanded Lorain.

"I used him—" Dr. Tyrrell's voice thickened and broke, and it was with an effort that he continued. "I used him to test my apparatus. Easy to impersonate — him. Cousins — same eyes — cut off beard—stooped shoulders—"

"You devil!" breathed Lorain, moistening his lips.

The connection between this statement and the mention of an experiment in Tyrrell's letter became clear to him.

"I've taken chloral hydrate, Lorain, but you will have to shoot yourself." Dr. Tyrrell roused himself again from the lethargy that seemed about to overcome him. "You're trapped as I was—left the key in the door. Here all day—trapped—"

Lorain whirled. It was true that the door was shut and locked; but, almost automatically, he had slipped the key into his pocket as he entered.

Satisfied that Dr. Tyrrell was harmless, he jumped to one of the cabinets and threw it out into the room. Behind it the surface of the wall was broken by a niche. In the niche, in addition to some storage batteries, he saw a mass of delicate and intricate apparatus from which countless antennæ rose. The antennæ were vibrating so that they stood forth to the eye as a glowing blur.

Lorain raised his gun and sent half a dozen steel-jacketed bullets into the heart of the contrivance. It went to ruin in an acrid haze of burnt powder. He served the instruments which he found in the niche behind the other cabinet with another volley. Then he unlocked the door and faced the dying man. Dr. Tyrrell's chin had gone forward upon his breast, but his eyes blazed malevolence.

"Vandal!" he whispered.

Lorain suddenly realized that not to save his own life had Tyrrell been willing to destroy his invention. Perhaps he could have stopped its deadly power in some other way, or perhaps he did not care to do so. Lorain never knew, for the light in the scientist's face went out suddenly and he sagged in his chair.

Norman Lorain stepped out into the corridor and closed the door softly behind him. Strangely, as he left the house of Dr. Jacob Tyrrell, he found himself happier than he had ever been before. He wondered—and then he began dimly to understand.

His thesis would have to be rewritten, for now he knew of his own knowledge that evil was not real, that it destroyed itself. Phyllis had been right. Love alone was eternal!

TOO LATE

Too late I bring my heart, too late 'tis yours;
Too late I bring the true love that endures;
  Too long, unthrift, I gave it here and there,
Spent it in idle love and idle song.
  Youth seemed so rich, with kisses all to spare—
Too late! Too long!

Too late, oh, fairy woman, dreams and dust
Are on your hair, your face is dimly thrust
  Amid the flowers! Old time, that all forgets,
Even you forget, and only I prolong
  The face I love with profitless regrets—
Too late! Too long!

Too long I tarried and too late I come,
Oh, eyes and lips so strangely sealed and dumb!
  My heart—what is it now, beloved, to you?
My love—that doth your holy silence wrong?
  Ah, fairy face, star-crowned and chrismed with dew—
Too late! Too long!

Nicholas Breton

Cuckoo Klock

AN INTERESTING PAGE FROM THE RECOLLECTIONS OF A BASEBALL MANAGER

By James W. Egan

HAVING been in baseball since the golden age when a foul strike didn't count and gamblers were gentlemen, I've naturally bumped into a sweet bunch of acorns in my time; but I think I'm willing to pass the flagon of wood alcohol to Oswald Klock. That pigeon was in a league by his lonesome. He could outhazel 'em all!

It was while I was manager and chief stockholder and sock-holder of the old Seapolis team of the North Pacific League, some annums ago, that I first met Oswald visage to visage. Rusty Shea and yours pensively were cussing and discussing the first-base problem. Three weeks under way in April, we needed a real ball-tosser on station one worse than a profiteer needs a hemp cravat. We were trying out a raw rookie from the Canadian jungles, and he wasn't getting by any better than honeyed words with a suspicious wife.

"Here I've gone and shot telegrams East until the messenger-boys ain't carryin' their cots to work any more," I rave to Rusty, while some of my gallant athletes was enjoyin' a little mornin' practise; "and I get as much attention as a plate of hardtack set in the midst of a flock of strawberry shortcakes. My screams of distress might as well be whispers. If somethin' don't—"

All of a sudden Rusty grabbed my arm and pointed to the bleacher gate.

"What holiday is this?" he gargles. "Pipe the parade, Joe!"

Sure enough, a merry little procession was marching onto the grounds. A young bloke hanging to the end of a cane, and all festooned and embellished with one of 'em suits that give the ad-writers a job, led the way. A freckled kid come next, struggling with a large suit-case. A tiny little wop followed with a bag, and a curly-wooled chocolate piccaninny tailed the line, a pair of bats parked on his shoulders.

When they got near us, the young man snaps out to his youthful battalion:

"Squad, halt! At ease, men!" Then he yodeled to us: "Good morrow, gentle sirs! Will you kindly page Mr. Joe Morse for me?"

"Consider him paged," I says, stepping forward. "He now stands before you in the flesh."

The newcomer made a dash and flung out his paw.

"Well, well—so this is Joe Morse! I know your brother intimately—old R. E. Morse. Small world, ain't it? Of course you're the man who pays the hotel bills for yon honest and perspirin' apple-pursuers? Quite so. Just one moment, please, while I muster out my young army."

He called the three kids, flipped each a two-bit piece, and told them to seek the shade until further notice.

"Now we'll talk business, Joe," he beams. "You don't mind me callin' you Joe, do you? I might as well, as long as they named you that. My own name is—"

"Probably Francis Z. Fresh," I cut in, pretty sharp. "I ain't got much time for small-town comedians, young fellow. What do you want?"

"Oh, a hundred and one apologies, Joe! Let the one go for the tax. Seriously speakin', however, I'm a ball-player, and I'm gonna give you a swell chance to sign me up. My name is Klock—Oswald Klock, with a capital K. I have perceived you are shy of first-base talent, and I want to tell you I'm a curly wolf and a leapin' panther around that cushion."

"Ha, ha!" busts out Rusty Shea. "You look it, Oswald. Where did you learn to play ball, anyhow?"

"Oh, I learned by mail," Klock retorts. "That's the way you learn everythin' these days. You know—twenty lessons. Prepare yourself at home. Clip out the coupon and send it away to-day. Don't delay. And I didn't. Behold—the graduate!"

He made a flourishing bow, and Rusty sniffed. Oswald give him a keen once-over.

"Pardon me, but don't you ever cut your hair, brother?" he asks, innocent-like. "How do you keep it out o' your eyes?"

Shea was fighting mad in ten seconds less than a jiffy, but I wouldn't let him start any rough stuff.

"You're a pretty flip yokel," I observe to Mr. Klock. "Outwardly you resemble a ball-player about as closely as a giraffe does a parlor pet; but you may be able to deliver, at that. I need a first-sacker, and need him bad. You'll probably be as bad as I could hope for. Anyway, go to the clubhouse and pull an old suit on. I'll see what you can, or can't, do."

"May your shadow never be less, oh, noble calif!" squawks this queer bird, and is off for the dressing-shack.

"His name may be Klock, but he looks more like a wrist-watch to me," grumbles the peeved Rusty. "If he gets gay with me again, I'll crash him for the circuit!"

In a few minutes Oswald was ready for a whirl at the initial corner. He filled his unie rather gracefully, and was wearing his own mitt on his right hand.

"So you're a port-sider?" I ask.

"Yes, that's what's the matter with me," he comes back. "Better get a contract typed out, and some ink in the old fountain pen. You'll be wantin' to peep at my fine Spencerian hand in a short time."

"Prance out on that cushion," I order. "If you play ball the way you chew the fat, you're another Daubert."

"Watch me, Joe!" he chirps, romping out on the diamond.

For the next five minutes every bird on the inner works was cutting that old agate loose at Mr. Klock as hard as he could buzz it. During the few minutes that Oswald had spent in shifting his garb I had wised the boys, and they intended to show him an interesting time.

Their throws didn't bother him much, though. He ate 'em up, high and low. He flitted around first like a gazel, and right *pronto* I knew I had found a bear of a fielder. He sure was fast on his dogs!

All the time he kept up a line of chatter, kidding my old vets without mercy. Finally a low throw oozed through him, and Rube Cutter, my third baseman, who figured to be quite a comical clown himself, bawls out:

"Come on there, useless! Get off your crutch!"

"What are you, a bowler?" flashes back Oswald. "You don't have to throw this ball down an alley. I guess that arm hasn't been out o' the moth-balls long enough, huh?"

Cutter got sore and tried to outguff him, but he had as much chance as a mud-turtle has of catching a jack-rabbit. Rube flopped with a dull thud, as did Bud Messina, the short-stop, who couldn't profit by experience.

No doubt Klock was a wiz in the field, so I sized him up in batting-practise. He didn't do anything startling with the willow, but he took a nice cut at the cherry and stood up at the plate well.

I signed him, and decided to give him a trial against Yancouver that same afternoon. In the clubhouse I knocked him down to all of the athletes. Crab Hannigan, the big center-fielder, who usually packed around a grouch of some kind, gave him the up and down several times.

"Klock, huh?" he says, shakin' hands. "I seem to know your face."

"Not as well as I know it, I'll bet," Oswald grins. "I've had to live with it all my life. Speakin' of knowin' people and things, though, do you know Fat Burns?"

"No, I don't," says Hannigan, falling.

"Well, it does!" Oswald winks at me as he pulls the good old chestnut. "Tag, you're it!"

Hannigan handed him a fierce look, and walked away. I called Klock to one side.

"You seem to have the makin's of a ball-tosser," I remark; "but this nut stuff will never win you any medals. Don't get the rest of the gang soured on you at the start — especially Crab Hannigan. He's bad medicine."

This was good advice. My center-fielder was a husky brute and a wicked miller. He had put several misguided young athletes into the hospital at various times. Kidding him was like taking a kick at a flock of dynamite—not so safe.

"All right, Joe," Oswald gargles. "I can't help bein' a fool. I was born on the 1st of April, and it's an awful handicap to me. But may that as it be. Really, I

do want to make a success at baseball. All my life I've yearned to be a succotash—I mean success—at somethin'. I've tried many things, and once or twice I've been tried for things. Father wanted me to be a doctor, but I didn't have the patience. Mother believed I was a born dentist—I'm always pullin' stuff, you know; but I aspired to the heights of literature. Even now my soul bursts with poetry. Did you ever hear my sonnet, "To a Weepin' Rhubarb"? It starts like this:

"The mewin' cat and the pensive cow
Leaped merrily from bough to bough."

"Stop it! Stop it!" I commanded hoarsely. "Another word, and I'll tear up your contract. You win the almond crown!"

II

NUT or not, Oswald nevertheless played nice ball against Yancouver in the afternoon. While he failed to hit safely, his sacrifice skier registered a run, and around that first tuft he was little Lizzie Lightning herself. The fans went bugs over the way he fielded the olive.

I wasn't long in choosing him for the job of regular first-sacker, and at the end of June every town in the loop was throwing fits over his wonderful fielding. He was a weak sticker, but the Seapolis fans were strong for him, just the same. All over the circuit he was popular.

Of course he was as goofy as ever. He was continually pulling nut comedy on the coaching-lines. He'd make faces, imitate the crouching walk of a trained chimpanzee, or start singing some little thing like "London Bridge is falling down, falling down," in a high falsetto when an opposing hurler went bad; and he helped more than one of them go that direction.

The sport scribes derived a terrible kick out o' Oswald. If he had a bad day in the field — which was seldom — they liked to write, "The Klock was slow," and if he was up to his usual jazz it would be, "The Klock is fast." One of them fastened his nickname on him. "Cuckoo Klock" was the label he annexed in this bird's story, and the monniker clung. It sure fitted that baby!

With our club, however, Oswald was not much more popular than a boot by the official scorer on what everybody knows was a clean base-knock. They figured him too fresh, and he was forever uncorking his goofy line on the gang. Rube Cutter was the only guy that acted a bit friendly. Crab Hannigan and Rusty Shea, who were pals, had as much use for him as a Frenchman has for the Kaiser.

Although Hannigan had a disposition a good deal like a pitcher of fermented cream, he seemed to stand fairly well with a fair young damsel who ran the magazine-stand in the Trelympic Hotel at Seapolis, where the unmarried athletes sojourned when the club was at home. Bonita Barr was the toothsome monniker of this fluff, and she was better-looking than some of the dames on the covers of the magazines she sold. A number of the boys had favored her until Crab horned in. They laid off *pronto*, for Hannigan was a bad *hombre* to cross.

All well and good, but one day Oswald Klock discovered the charming Bonita, and immediately there was action. He strolled over to the stand, with several of the bunch watching him.

"I'd like one of your late magazines," he chirps. "Not more than a year late, if you can help it, my dear."

"I'm not your dear," says Bonita. "I've something here that you'll like, though—a new booklet called 'The Brain and Its Use.'"

"That's a mean slap on the back of the hand, sunny maid," Oswald yodels. "By the way, did you know your complexion matches red roses in a snow-bank?"

"Is that all you have to think about?" she gets out, kind o' startled at that last.

"Oh, no—no, indeed, fair lady. I was just wonderin' if you had any place to go for dinner this evenin'?"

"No, I haven't;" and she smiles.

"You're gonna be pretty hungry by breakfast-time, then. Gimme a copy of the *Country Cousin*, and don't wrap it up, if you please."

Beautiful Bonita was frowning when he walked away, and Bud Messina grinned at Rube Cutter.

"Well, he's out with her," says the short-stop. "I knew that clown didn't have any sense. No jane will stand for that stuff a minute."

"You don't know so much about janes," observes Rube. "They get funny notions themselves. But he'd better lay off her. I'll hand him some fatherly advice."

And the good-natured Cutter did so.

"Better leave Bonita be," he cautions

Oswald. "She's Crab Hannigan's girl, and he figures her to be his private property. When Crab does that it's wise to stay off the bases."

"Aha! Likewise, oho!" sings Cuckoo. "How I wish I had known that! I would have dabbled a little further, and made a date with the fairy for a show or somethin'. I'm gonna step her out, Ruby. She's got eyes like blue diamonds, ain't she?"

"You'll have eyes like black diamonds if you're fool enough to butt in there," warns the third-sacker.

Cuckoo Klock had plenty of nerve, though. After the next day's game he began buzzing Bonita again.

"What do you say to samplin' this new comical musedy show at the opery-house to-night and mebbe take on a little dancin' immediately thereafter?" he proposes. "I can sure shake a brace of wicked dogs on the old maple, and I'll bet you're sixty candle-power on your feet."

Bonita raises her eyebrows.

"How do you mean—sixty candle-power?" she asked.

"Light," responds the Cuckoo gravely.

Well, the girl had a large laugh over that wheeze, and the upshot of it all was they did go out together that night.

Crab Hannigan knew it, of course. He didn't say much, but his face was blacker than a trip through a tunnel. Rusty Shea nodded to himself.

"Klock is gonna get stopped, first thing he knows," was his joyous assertion. "Hannigan is on the way to become peevish and uncontrollable—and how he battles when he loses his temper!"

Not wishing to see my speedy first-baseman crippled, I thought I would have a little chat with Crab, and counsel moderation.

"He's too fresh," the outfielder growls when I get through. "No smart Aleck is gonna fool around with my woman long, I'll tell the world!"

"Don't go pickin' a fight with him, Crab," I yodel. "If you do, and put him out o' commission, it 'll cost you a sweet little bunch of jack. I'll sure sap a fine on you!"

"Oh, he and I are bound to have it out some day," snaps Hannigan. "I know I've had trouble with that guy before. His face is kind o' familiar, even if the name ain't. Seems to me we had a muss years and years back, and I been tryin' to remember what it was over."

"What I said about the fine goes, Crab," I warn him.

Whether my threat had anything to do with it or not I couldn't be sure, but there was no battle during the few following days. Bonita journeyed around as many places with Oswald as she did with Hannigan—possibly more. Crab's grouch was terrible to behold, and I knew he had squawked to the girl without much apparent success.

"He'll tear Klock apart some day," Rusty Shea promises. "He's restrainin' himself better than I ever saw him before, and I'm actually surprised at the Crab; but the big smash is bound to come, and when it does—wow!"

"Mebbe the kid can scrap himself," remarks Rube Cutter.

"Blah!" snorts Rusty. "I could trim two like him myself. Besides, I think he's a bit yellow."

"Oh, now, Rusty! I think you're wrong there," says Rube.

"I am, huh? Let me tell you somethin' I saw with my own eyes the other night. A shrimp about the size of Bud Messina was arguin' with Cuckoo in a pool-room, and Oswald looked scared to death. He didn't dare talk back to the little guy. I say he's yellow, and some day you'll see I'm right!"

I was really afraid Hannigan would break loose some day, fine or no fine, and I spoke to Oswald.

"Ain't you puttin' it on a little strong?" I query. "You know Bonita has been Crab's steady, and he has a temper that's liable to explode any old time. I want no internal strife in this club, with us up in the race as we are. Hannigan will half kill you if he starts on you."

"The lecture would be better if illustrated, Joe," my first-baseman responds. "Have some slides next time. Bonita and yours affectionately are all O. K. She ain't askin' waivers on me. I guess I'm a wonderful relief to a regular little girl after steady doses of the Crab. Don't look so stern and rock-bound, Joe. Play with me. 'All around the mulberry bush, mulberry bush, mulberry bush—'"

What use for me to waste my priceless breath on a goof like that?

III

A MONTH passed without a mill between the rivals, however. Everybody was sur-

prised at the Crab's patience, except me; and even I had expected an eruption before this.

The Amocat club was in town for a series with us. Both of us were battling to head the league, and we finally dumped them off the roof Friday. Klock had played swell ball all week, scampering around station one like a hare—the March variety, of course—but he wasn't hitting hard enough to imperil the shell of a cackleberry. Oswald might be a fielding wonder, yet his prowess with the cue was nothing to wake the welkin with.

In the lobby of the Trelympic that evening Crab Hannigan was gathered with two or three of the boys when I marched in. For once Bonita Barr was not out with either Oswald or the outfielder. Cuckoo was curled up in a leather chair, reading a comic paper.

"The Chaplin of the diamond is over there tryin' to dig up a few more laughs," Bud Messina remarks to me.

"Some day he'll quit laughin' for a long time," mutters Crab Hannigan.

"Come on, Crab, and forget it!" I advise. "We're on top now, and I can't afford to let anythin' disturb the team. As long as Klock isn't pickin' any fight, let him alone."

"Oh, he'll never pick any," asserts Rusty Shea. "Do you remember I told you once about that little shrimp who—say, that's him comin' into the hotel now. He must be on Cuckoo's trail for somethin'."

A light-weight individual with a seamed face that had been the parking-place of many earnest fists had sauntered into the lobby. He was scowling hard, and appeared to be in a mood for trouble.

Lamping Oswald in the easy chair, the newcomer strode over and cut loose some angry remarks. Our first-baseman arose and seemed to be trying hard to turn away wrath with soft speech. It was plainly apparent that he was frightened by this bullet, who wasn't more than half his size.

"I've a notion to knock your block off, you stiff!" yodels the shrimp at last. "Come out in the alley, and I'll trim the daylights out o' you."

"I won't argue with you at all," we heard Cuckoo chirp; and I'll be hanged if he didn't beat it to the desk, grab his key, and go up-stairs!

The small but hard-boiled stranger stared after his retreating form a couple of seconds, favored our group with a hostile glance, and then ambled out o' the hotel muttering to himself.

"Oh, no, Oswald ain't yellow!" squawks Rusty. "Oh, no!"

"I could lick that shrimp myself," adds Messina. "I didn't imagine that fresh Cuckoo could be bluffed so easy. It's a cinch I'll never take any more guff from him!"

Crab Hannigan said nothing, but there was a queer light in his eyes. I had a hunch plenty of grief was on tap for Oswald Klock, and I was both dismayed and disgusted. No man likes a fellow who is yellow.

The following matinée, being a Saturday combat, brought a whale of a crowd out, and I started Harry Fullerton in the box against old Dizzy Coffman, the underhand sharp of the visitors.

The game was expected to be a pitchers' battle, but it proved anything but that. Fullerton didn't have his stuff, and was clouted off the heap in the second stanza. Thompson, whom I trotted out to relieve him, was also slammed hard, and only pulled out o' some bad holes through snappy fielding.

Dizzy Coffman wasn't as much of a mystery as usual, either, and at the end of the seventh we had four tallies to seven for Amocat, and were punching the pill hard. It looked like their contest, however, for Dizzy was getting great backing.

In the final split of the eighth, with two in the grave, Hannigan combed a double. Cutter wheedled four wide ones from Dizzy, and then Messina scratched a blow, jamming the burlaps and bringing Cuckoo Klock to the platter.

I was tempted to jerk Oswald for a pinch hitter, as the sport writers call them, but he had been playing his bag like Fred Tenney, and I had darned little hitting material on the bench; so I let him swing the hickory, although he hadn't registered a base bruise since Wednesday.

Coffman made him bite at a couple of slow underhand twisters, and then tried to zip over a fast one for the final strike. Klock swung like this bird Babe Ruth must, and he nailed the old apple square on the pick. Toward right field it soared.

Seapolis has the right wall pretty deep. In the five years since the orchard had been built nobody had busted one over the fence, and the fans had been waiting a long time

for such a smear. This was the afternoon they got the big thrill of the year. Oswald's blow cleared the barricade by ten feet. It was a home-run with three men on! Klock was the last player in the world I'd expect to turn this trick, but the weak stickers will surprise us wise guys.

As it happened, that wallop won the game for us, and clinched our grip on first place for the series, at least.

Oswald was tickled to his toes, of course.

"Think I'll be sold or drafted at the end of the season?" he asks me, under the showers.

"They'll never draft you unless there's another war," growls Rusty Shea. "That was a lucky cut, believe me!"

"Thank you so much, fond admirer!" bows Oswald, getting into his rags. "Your batting average could stand a few of them four-leaf clovers, too."

"Aw, don't get chesty!" snarls Rusty.

"I need a chest for my silver," smiles Cuckoo, who had been donated the usual collection for his four-bagger. The fans had tossed out over thirty smacks. "This jack will come in handy. I got a date to-night, and how I'm gonna put it on!"

Crab Hannigan paused in fastening his necktie.

"May I inquire, Mr. Klock," he utters, gentle-like, "if that date you mention is by any chance with Miss Barr?"

Immediately I sniffed trouble; but Oswald answered before I could open my mouth.

"That is no more your business than the corner grocery is mine, Crab," he remarks. "You needn't ask me such questions in the clubhouse after this. I may tell you, though, that I am makin' the date with the young lady you refer to, Hannigan."

"Well, listen to me, freshie!" barks the outfielder. "You don't keep that date. I'm goin' out with her to-night—and every other night. You're through. Stay away from her—that's my order. Stay away!"

"Hasn't the girl anythin' to say about that?" says the first-baseman.

This was bad stuff in the clubhouse, but Hannigan had worked himself into a fury.

"Never mind what she'll say!" he storms. "I have given you my orders. You do as I say or I'll beat the life out o' you!"

"Your act is rotten, Crab," comes back Cuckoo, with more nerve than I looked for. "I'm keepin' any dates I make."

"All right; this is your finish!" flashes Hannigan, and he rolls up his sleeves.

"Cut it out, Crab!" I command. "I'll fine you! I'll give you a suspension if you—"

"I don't give a whoop what you do. Fine and be damned! He and I are gonna have this thing out right now!"

I couldn't stop the infuriated outfielder. He advanced upon Oswald, who shrank back.

"You quit pickin' on me," he cries. "I never done nothin' to you, you big bully. You quit pickin' on me now!"

Hannigan hesitated strangely at this childish, whining plaint, and then leaped for the first-baseman, swinging his hard fists.

The shrinking Oswald straightened up as if by magic, eluded the outfielder's rush, and ripped home a left that almost flattened Hannigan's nose.

Followed a most amazing mill. Cuckoo Klock was no faster around the first cushion than he was with his mitts, and his speedy left licked Crab from the start. The husky outfielder received the best beating of his life, and measured his length on the floor three times before he was ready to yell for an armistice.

I was pretty nearly as much knocked out as the Crab. Of all the unexpected things Cuckoo Klock had pulled this was the prize-winner. Never before had I seen Hannigan whipped in a scrap, though of course he was only a slugger, not a boxer; and Oswald was just about the last baby on this giddy globe I could have figured to put it across.

As for Rusty Shea and Bud Messina, they were struggling for air like a couple of salmon on a dock. The rest of the boys were shocked silent, and only Rube Cutter was wearing a sort o' smile.

"I have an idea I'll keep that date, Crab," observed Klock, as his victim slowly scrambled to his feet. "You should have obeyed that impulse and not battled. I saw you hesitate when I pulled that old speech on you, and you should have kept right on hesitatin'. Did your memory fail you?"

"I knew I had seen you before!" mutters the dejected Hannigan. "It always seemed to me we had fought, and you had licked me. That's why I steered away from you so long. Last night, though, I figured I had been all wrong—but I wasn't."

"No, you weren't, Crab," grins Klock. "This is the second time I have had to lick you. The other time we were kids. You were the neighborhood terror, and one day you picked on me because I happened to be the preacher's little boy. I was scared to death at first, and I said the same things I said a little while ago; but when you came at me, and I found I had to fight, I learned bigness doesn't always count for so much. I handed you a swell lickin' that day, Crab!"

"Preacher's son! Now I remember!" confesses Hannigan. "But your name was—"

"Wallack. I was, and am, Willie Wallack. You see, my father is still alive, and wouldn't approve of my playing ball every day and Sunday, too; so I changed my name. Bein' naturally goofy, I picked out a goofy name."

The young fellow grins as he pulls this, and something told me right then he was a slick article. I recalled the way he had marched into the ball park.

"Look here, Willie—or Oswald!" I gargle. "Who is that tough guy who walked into the hotel last night? Somethin' tells me that was stage-managed."

"Oh, Joe, how can you?" utters Cuckoo. "But I suppose I may as well 'fess up. I recognized Crab the minute I joined the club, and after I met—well, you all know about it—I figured he would be goin' to the mat with me. I had licked him once, and believed I could do it again, but I wasn't gonna take chances; so I located my old friend, Terry Hoye, the ex-featherweight, and polished up a bit on my boxin'. Terry is a hard egg, and a couple of times, when my dates interfered with my lessons, he threatened to just naturally knock my block off. That's his idea of humor, you understand. Anyhow," Klock rattles on, "it gives me a hunch, and I had him come into the hotel and hand me one of his bawlin'-outs. I knew Crab and I would mix some day, and I figured it would hasten the happy hour if I seemed to lack spunk. Inside playin', Joe! Now it's all over I'm willin' to bury the hatchet and smoke the piece of pipe—that is, pipe of peace. As a favor to me, Joe, please forget Crab's fine. He and I have met, and all the salary should be ours. What do you say, Poppa Joey?"

"Still the old Cuckoo!" I observe. "Well, shake hands, boys, and I'll call it a day. No hard feelin's, I hope?"

"I know when I'm licked," Hannigan gargles. "I had a hunch not to fight this guy all along. I'll shake."

"Thanks, Hannigan." The first-baseman gripped his mitt. "I'm sorry, but I guess Bonita has kind o' picked on me for her team, Crab. She figures if she keeps me around the house all the time she'll never have to buy any joke-books. And now, before I go, I have somethin' to say—never give orders to any one, unless it is for ham and eggs. That's all, Crab. Now you tell one. With that out, I'll pull a Tosti. Good-by, gang!"

"Can you beat it?" squawks Rusty Shea after the Cuckoo had departed. "He ain't no False Alarm Klock, after all. And to think that goof is a preacher's son! Well, brethren, you'll never see me pick no fights with nobody on this ball club hereafter. I ain't got any confidence in myself any more. I never went to Sunday-school when I was a kid!"

LOVE'S PHASES

Love is like the moon—at first
  Just a narrow strip of light,
But of silver pure, immersed
  In the all-engulfing night.

Swift it waxes, deepens till
  It is like a broken heart,
Throbbing not, but shedding still
  Light of gold to every part.

Yet increasing, lo, it grows
  Till perfection crowns the finish—
When the moon in fulness glows,
  It commences to diminish.

William Wallace Whitelock

The Snowden Feet

MY QUEST OF BURIED TREASURE, AND WHAT I FOUND

By Jack Bechdolt

I SHALL never forget the day my mother cried because I had Snowden feet. Then began a puzzle that took years to answer. It was only the other day—and I am near middle age now — that I fully understood her tears.

One of the very first things I remember about this existence was a round, varnished globe that stood on the desk in the little room that was my father's study. Probably it first engaged my young affections because it was shiny. As I grew older, and began to understand what it represented, I spent many hours with it.

Much of the playtime of those early years I used in dreaming over that shiny paper sphere, puzzling out the barbaric, unpronounceable names and building queer fancies from them; tracing courses over the blue oceans; trying to imagine the look and feel and smell of far-away islands represented by pin-points of black ink.

The Snowdens were adventurers. Sometimes the trait skipped from one branch of the family to another. My father, for instance, lived nearly all his life in or near Fordby, a school-teacher whose widest travel was attendance at the State teachers' convention at St. Louis, whose greatest daring was a sail on Green Lake in a catboat; but his brother, Captain Dair Snowden, after whom I was named, commanded a bark and was lost off the South American coast while engaged in some gun-running revolutionary plot. Every generation of us produces at least one with restless feet and a curiosity for what's beyond the horizon.

Early in life I learned that about the Snowdens. One day I overheard a discussion between my parents, and, finding that it concerned me, I listened with all my attention, crouched below the open library window.

"If we don't do something about it," my mother was saying, "Dair will grow up a rolling stone like his uncle. Why, all he thinks about is pirates and buried gold and cannibals and running away to sea. It's those trashy books you let him read!"

My father pooh-poohed her alarm.

"Reading won't hurt the boy," he insisted. "The more trash he reads now, the sooner he'll turn to something better. He's got to learn for himself."

"But his ideas! Yesterday he told me deliberately he meant to run away to sea the minute he was old enough!"

This my father answered with a chuckle.

"I believe you want him to!" my mother burst out, with a vehemence rare in her. "I believe you'd like to see him turn out a sailor—or a vagabond! Yet you ought to know that's been the curse of the Snowdens, if anybody does!"

As she said it, her voice came closer to me, and I saw her staring out the window above me, her back to the room. I was astonished to see that she was crying.

I heard my father's step as he joined her, and burrowed flatter under the hollyhocks to escape discovery.

"Anne," he said very seriously, "if the boy's got Snowden feet, nothing we can say or do will cure him. That's his problem. He's got to find it out for himself."

I was much struck with the expression, "Snowden feet," and took the first opportunity to examine my bare feet for indications of the family curse. As far as I could see they were ordinary boy feet, rather the worse for stone bruises and a cut toe from a broken bottle.

II

It was almost twenty years after, when I got Bert Embee's letter offering me a berth on the Hawk, soon to sail for Juan Fernandez Island and buried gold, that I

thought again of Snowden feet and decided that I had them.

During those twenty years I had not run away to sea once—nor had I run anywhere, in fact. When I was fifteen, my father died and passed the burden of supporting his widow to my shoulders. I went to work in August Bush's Boston Store. When my mother found her place by her husband's side in the Fordby churchyard, I was going on nineteen and a clerk. After that there were debts—a man-size accumulation of them—to be settled. I thought my running-away days were buried deep in the lost years.

Yet even before Bert Embee's letter came, I had had my struggles with the Snowden feet. There were times when the smug, monotonous life of Fordby got on my nerves to such an extent that it was like an ulcerated tooth.

I can remember nights when I walked with my pain, and just the sight of the stars in the blue-black sky would set me wild with desire to lie under the brilliant constellation of the Southern Cross; when I would imagine the dull, never-ending thunder of long Pacific surges on some lonely coral reef until the hurt of longing made me clench my fists and cry aloud.

But responsibilities were my stout anchor during these storms, and gradually the monotony of Fordby and the Boston Store drugged me.

Bert Embee had been my chum up to the first year I worked for August Bush. That winter he disappeared from Fordby overnight under rather discreditable circumstances. Nobody heard of him until I got his letter. This is what he wrote:

DEAR FRIEND DAIR:

I expect you'll be surprised to get this, but I haven't forgot you. Remember how we used to talk about going to sea, and all that sort of thing, when we were kids and ducked school to go swimming in the creek? Well, Dair, I've been to sea—put in most of seven years in sail, and got my mate's papers. I'm first mate of the bark Hawk right now.

Holding this berth on the Hawk made me think about you and the things we used to plan. The old man—that means the skipper—his name is Captain Robin Blake, and he's got a bug there's some gold buried on Juan Fernandez Island, the same one Robinson Crusoe lived on. He's got up a company that's going to send the Hawk to find it. Sounds like old times—eh, Dair?

We're outfitting here at Eagle, planning to sail next month. If you've still got any of your old notions about going a voyage, and are looking for a lot of excitement and travel, I can get you a berth on this bark. You'll have to ship as an A. B. and take your pay in stock in the company. That will give you a share in whatever we find—if we find anything.

It's a chance for some fun, old-timer, and expenses paid after you get to Eagle. Being mate, I can put you wise to the work and all that. If you ever want to see any place besides that mudhole of a Fordby, you'd better telegraph me as soon as you get this. I'll hold the berth open.

I was taking stock in the women's ready-to-wear department the morning I got Bert's letter. Reading it interrupted my list at " misses' thirty-six," and I never finished. I ran across the street to the telegraph-office without my hat, wrote a two-word message to Bert, paid for it, and rushed out again, holding my breath for fear that something might happen at the last possible moment to change my plans.

I didn't give myself much more time to think before I told August Bush he could find a new clerk.

" I'm leaving to-night for the West," I said.

" If it's important business, I'll hold your place open for you," Bush offered.

" You needn't bother," I replied grandly. " I'm never coming back."

" Never is a long time," Bush said, smiling in his placid, irritating way. If I had told him I had been made Czar of Russia, and had to leave for Petrograd, he'd have taken it with the same smile. " Never is a long, long time, Dair. You know Fred's leaving makes a vacancy there. As floor-manager, now—"

" Thanks, Mr. Bush, I wouldn't change my plans if you gave me the store."

" Well!" Bush sighed placidly. " It's rather annoying. It really isn't fair to me to leave without notice, but you've given good service. Wait, here's an order on the cashier for what's coming to you."

At eight o'clock that evening I was on the west-bound train.

III

BERT EMBEE had changed a good deal. Perhaps I had changed, too, though he insisted that I was just the same.

Bert was a good-looking fellow, a year or so my senior. He was dark-skinned and black-haired, with sleepy brown eyes and regular, clear-cut features. Always he had been restless, pleasure-loving, impatient of restraint. It seemed to me, when I met him at Eagle, that to these traits experience had added a sort of cheap sophistication—

a tinge of discontent that rather dashed my first enthusiasm.

I reached that little Western port afire with the lust of adventure. All the day-dreams that I buried in the Boston Store routine promised to become reality by a miracle so sudden that I could scarcely credit it. I had hardly any sleep on the two-day train journey. Something of this I tried to express to Bert.

He laughed.

"You're a green one, all right! I don't believe you're more than fifteen years old to-day. You'd better get it straight in your head now, old son, that you're shipping on the Hawk in the fo'c's'le. You're a common sailor, and a green hand at that; and as far as I know there isn't any yellow dog living that's lower than a sailor. Forget this 'Yoho and a bottle of rum' stuff, and make up your mind you're going to work harder than you ever did before, and live worse."

"I don't care!" I grinned fatuously. "I'm going to see the ocean, and sail to foreign ports, and explore tropical islands, and dig for buried treasure!"

"As for foreign ports," said Bert, "as far as I can see one's about like another, excepting the climate's worse in every new one you come to. Rotten booze and a lot of sharps to rob you of your wages—that's what you find in foreign ports. And as for buried treasure—"

Bert left that sentence unfinished and ignored my questions about it.

We walked a few blocks to the town's small water-front, and I had my first glimpse of salt water. Yes, and I took the first opportunity to taste it, as I supposed every greenhorn does, just to be sure it is actually salt.

"There's the old hooker." Bert pointed across the water. "Just beyond the lumber schooner—that's the Hawk. She's a rare bird, built in Fairhaven, Massachusetts, in the sixties, but I don't doubt she can still sail. Not that I ever saw her try. I joined at Oakland Creek, and she was towed up here."

Whether the Hawk was a rare bird or not I had no way of telling then; but I saw a ship, a three-masted ship, such a ship as I knew by pictures, and in my unsophisticated eyes she was the loveliest thing made by man. I'm not ashamed to say that I looked at her through a mist of happy tears.

We got into a dingey that bore the ship's name, and Bert bade me take the oars. Before we drew alongside he said abruptly:

"Look here, get this straight now—I'm mate, and as long as we're on the deck of this hooker I'm your boss. You do what I tell you, jump quick when you're spoken to, and call me 'sir'—don't forget that. Speak when you're spoken to and tack on a 'sir' to everybody in the after cabin. Whenever we're alone together, I'm going to help you out all I can for old-time's sake; otherwise you're just a common hand, and don't forget it. Got that straight?"

"Yes," I said.

"Yes *what?*"

"Yes, sir."

Bert nodded curtly, to indicate that that was better. Now I understand what I did not then. The Hawk was Bert's first ship. He had not been long from the forecastle himself. When he got the greenhorn from Fordby aboard the Hawk as a hand, he was assured of at least one soul to be impressed by his rise in the nautical world. The situation must have been particularly pleasant to Bert, because in the old days he had looked up to me a little.

We went up over the side, and I stared about and aloft. I don't know enough about a ship to this day to describe the Hawk well. She was a bark, and I think she was a good specimen of American shipbuilding. To my mind, which that day was full of—

> The beauty and mystery of the ships,
> And the magic of the sea—

she was like heaven.

Bert woke me from my daze.

"Drop that bag and follow me," he said.

I followed him aft, across the quarter-deck and below to the Hawk's cabin, where three men sat about a table. Bert, who was careful to announce himself by a knock, produced me as the new hand, and I was signed on. Captain Blake explained briefly that the voyage was to Juan Fernandez Island and other ports in his discretion, that I was to be paid in stock in the Crusoe Island Investment Company, and that I would thus become a shareholder and partner in whatever profits accrued from the voyage.

I knew nothing of laws or shipping commissioners. I signed blithely!

Captain Robin Blake was past middle age, tall, very straight, and reddish brown

all over. His whiskers were of a cinnamon hue, as were his brows and eyelashes. His bald head and face had tanned almost the same shade. His little eyes, set aslant, gleamed red. The general effect was that of a red fox—a snappy, bad-tempered red fox with a harsh bark; and this resemblance was heightened by his trick of sucking in his cheeks when he peered at you.

The men with Captain Blake were his partners. Captain Blye, a squat, powerful man with frosty blue eyes and curt Yankee speech, resembled the great Napoleon gone to seed. Ed Cashman, treasurer of the company, was big and blond, a hustling, blustering, bluffing adventurer. I learned their names and their positions later. At the time I was only allowed to sign my name and dismissed with scant attention.

I found that the Hawk's crew consisted of two men—myself and a sullen, stupid lout named George. There was a negro cook in the galley. Bert Embee told me that the rest of the hands would not be signed on until the ship was ready to sail.

When would we sail? What treasure was it lay buried and waiting for our spades to reveal it? The answers to these and other questions I was to learn gradually, and the three weeks it took me to learn them I spent in hard, monotonous labor. It needed all my enthusiasm for the sea, all the influence of the Snowden feet, to see me through it.

George and I stowed provisions and supplies that were lightered to our bark. We scrubbed decks, polished brass, and clung to scaffolding in the blistering heat, daubing on paint. We scraped rust and we tarred rope. We sweated aloft, overhauling rigging. We pulled our oars in the Hawk's boat until the blisters on my hands seemed to overshadow everything else in life. And yet I wasn't unhappy, nor did I altogether lose my first enthusiasm. I had a bad case of Snowden feet.

From a pamphlet Cashman dropped one day I learned about our expedition. Captain Blye, who it appeared had roamed the world from pole to pole and lived through several lifetimes of adventure, had located a Spanish galleon sunk centuries ago in a cove of Juan Fernandez. That the galleon was lost there was common information, and natives of the island occasionally found old coins washed on the beach; but it remained for Blye to locate the treasure, which was described as gold and silver bullion, specie, and various altar vessels of rare Spanish workmanship.

Captain Blye had joined with the widely known Yankee skipper, Captain Blake, in forming the Crusoe Island Investment Company, and anybody could buy, at a most attractive price, as many shares of stock as he wanted, certain that in a few months he would be repaid a hundredfold when the expedition returned with a shipload of treasure.

The pamphlet showed several pictures of the Hawk, portraits of Captains Blye and Blake, and a chart of Juan Fernandez, which lies a few hundred miles off the shore of Chile.

I also learned that the Hawk was to sail on the 15th of May that same year; but as it was now June, a hitch had evidently occurred. I overheard Captain Blake tell a visitor we would weigh anchor within the week; but that, too, was a prediction unfulfilled. In time rumors of our immediate sailing ceased to waken me to feverish excitement.

"Why worry about that?" said Bert Embee, with his cynical smile, when I mentioned sailing. "Once you're afloat, you'll think your work in port is boy's play compared to working ship. Besides, isn't there a lot of fun ashore?"

There may have been fun ashore for Bert, who found his pleasures in questionable company. In my longing to be off after buried gold I thought Eagle about the stupidest small city in the world.

But that was before I saw Letty Teal.

IV

THE Crusoe Island Investment Company maintained a small office in the town for the sale of stock. Bert told me that the company was extensively advertised in newspapers throughout the country—"especially in the Middle West," he added. "It's the little stick-in-the-mud places like Fordby, where folks never saw salt water, that grow the suckers who buy stock in a treasure expedition."

His tone nettled me. "Look here!" I exclaimed. "You talk as if there was something queer about this expedition!"

"I didn't say anything of the sort. As far as I know there may be a hundred Spanish galleons sunk off Juan Fernandez. Hardly anybody goes there to find out. I don't worry about the expedition at all, and I don't get too curious about it, either.

That's the captain's business—and the company's. Take my advice, old son—stick to your own job, and let them worry about buried treasure; and don't ask any questions!"

As if I could forget the buried treasure! Why else had I come two thousand miles to join the Hawk? What other thought buoyed me through the dirty, hard work of those three weeks?

Almost every day we had visitors to the ship, some of them stockholders and some prospective buyers. One of the captains or Cashman was usually aboard to entertain them.

One afternoon, when the after cabin was empty and George was ashore on boat duty, I had the deck to myself and nothing to do. I leaned on the bulwarks in the warm sun, my nostrils snuffing up the salt breeze, my eyes on the harbor mouth, and my Snowden feet tingling for foreign strands, lost to reality.

A hail, several times repeated, brought me to finally, and I saw a small launch alongside our Jacob's ladder. The launchman landed a young woman passenger and promised to return for her within an hour.

I helped her on deck and discovered that she was disturbingly lovely. Letty Teal was about my own age, slender, with a fine, straight carriage and a springy step. She was dressed all in white that warm day, and her hair was a reddish gold, like the flame of the summer sun just as it touches the horizon. Her eyes were a cornflower blue, and her friendly, ready smile won me instantly.

"I want to look over the ship," she said; "and I'd like to hear about this buried treasure you're going to find."

I told her that the managers of the company were all away, but if she didn't mind a plain sailor doing the honors I could show her.

"I'd rather have a sailor show me than anybody else," Letty declared in a manner that made me her abject slave from that moment.

I showed off the Hawk, and answered a hundred questions about her, with the pride of a young man who has just come into a fund of new knowledge. The old bark was a beautiful thing in my eyes, from the carved wooden figurehead of a goddess that nestled under her bowsprit down to the last tarred rope; and I was vain enough to think that I made her seem attractive to Letty.

When our visitor was tired, she sat on the main hatch coaming.

"Sit down beside me," she commanded, "and tell me all about the buried gold you're going to find."

Beside her on that hatch, our backs to the town, the rigging towering above us, the smell of tar and salt in the air, and the sun pleasantly warm, I spun the yarn of the Spanish galleon with all the enthusiasm I had bottled up since I first heard from Bert Embee.

When I had finished her blue eyes were sparkling.

"I wish I was a man!" she cried. "I'd go sailing for Spanish gold!"

I heartily responded that I wished she was. Hers was the first match for my own enthusiasm.

"But I think you're a lot nicer as a girl," I added hastily, "if you don't mind a sailor's saying so."

She shrugged, as if it didn't matter, and sat thinking, her chin in her hand. With her so close beside me I was thinking, too—picturing the two of us afloat together, exploring strange coral islands, shipwrecked, perhaps, in some Eden of our own.

"I think I'll invest," she said abruptly. "I'll put a thousand into it!"

"If I was rich," I responded, "I'd buy my own yacht and sail away to find my own treasure."

Letty laughed.

"Gracious, I'm not rich! I work for a living, just like you; but I have a thousand dollars. It was left me by my grandfather, and I think I'm going to invest it in Spanish gold."

"Look here, if that's all your fortune, I wouldn't—" I started to say earnestly.

I got no further, for Bert Embee hailed me. I had forgotten that Bert was aboard, napping in his cabin. He came striding down from the break of the poop.

"What is it, Snowden?" he asked curtly. "Did this lady want to see the captain? I'll attend to it."

I rose slowly and hesitated.

"That's all, Snowden," Bert said sharply. "Go forward!"

I went with my ears burning and my fingers itching to murder him.

After I had seen Letty Teal taken away by the launch I walked up to Bert.

"Look here!" I began. "Just because you're mate—"

"That 'll do, Snowden," Bert retorted in his best officerial manner. "You're lucky Captain Blake didn't find you entertaining a prospect; and next time don't forget that 'sir' when you're spoken to!"

If I had struck him, it would have been mutiny. I controlled the impulse, but I didn't give him his "sir."

After that I thought of nothing but Letty Teal. She was in my mind waking, and in my dreams. I never cared much about the girls in Fordby, but when I saw Letty I knew I was in love.

I had a fairly active imagination, and after Letty came into my life I had plenty to exercise it on. All my plans centered about finding a way to see her and talk with her again. I wanted to see her more than I wanted anything.

That same evening, when I was on the quarter-deck on some errand, I glanced through the skylight and saw the two captains and Cashman sitting about the cabin table. They had glasses and a bottle. Cashman's voice reached me through the open ventilator as he flourished his glass.

"Gentlemen, I drink to buried gold!" he said.

"And the three merry gold-diggers!" said Captain Blake.

"And the stockholders!" Captain Blye twanged.

At this the three of them burst out laughing. I didn't like the way they laughed. I would have listened longer, but Bert Embee called me forward.

Several days later I was helping the cook shift our new stores, looking for a case of canned peaches. When we found it, we broke open the box. Instead of tins of peaches it contained rubbish. We broke open a second and a third case, and found the same fraud. Cases of beef and a barrel of hardtack proved equally deceptive.

We called in Bert and showed him the cheat. He said he would report it to Captain Blake; but nothing was done about it. Later he told me to "forget it."

"Do you mean to say you're going to let this ship sail only half provisioned?" I demanded.

"Young fellow, the less questions you ask the less trouble you'll get into," Bert answered darkly.

I was beginning to see that there was something very shady about the bark Hawk and the three jovial adventurers in her after cabin.

I had to find Letty Teal at once, to warn her against investing her money.

V

WORK had been growing less these last few days. I don't think Bert repented driving us, but his invention began to fail him. I got ashore next afternoon and started roaming the streets, wondering how to find Letty.

Eagle was not such a large city that finding her would have been hard if I had known her name at that time. As it was, I might have wandered a week without results had not Letty found me.

"Why, it's Mr. Snowden!" I heard a well-remembered voice exclaim; and there she stood before me, offering her hand like an old friend. "I'm off work an hour early to-day," she said, nodding in the direction of the business block where we met before. "I'm secretary to the manager of that life insurance company. How lucky I saw you! Now we can have another talk—if you're not busy?"

I said I had been very busy up to that moment, looking for her without even knowing her name. She told me that she was Letty Teal, and suggested that we should walk over to the little park in the public square.

"I want to hear more about the Spanish gold," she said. "I'm a stockholder now. I invested my thousand, so I have a perfect right to ask all the questions I can think of." She had my arm, and was smiling into my face, which must have looked pretty sober, for she added: "Don't look scared! Even as a stockholder I won't be very fierce with you."

"Look here, Miss Teal, did you ask advice from some experienced business man before you invested all your money in the expedition?"

"No. I bought the shares the very next day. I was so excited I could hardly wait. It was your eloquence did it. After the way you told me about that treasure down there on Robinson Crusoe's island, I couldn't sleep for thinking of ships and voyages and adventures. I just had to have some part in it. It's all your doing. Well!" she added suddenly. "You might look a little more complimented. It isn't everybody can talk me into things!"

My face must have looked as long as a blue Sunday as we sat down on the park bench. I couldn't think what to say. A

sort of horror at being held responsible for her investing that thousand-dollar legacy made me tongue-tied. I had come ashore specially to warn her, and it was already too late!

I still felt that I must warn her, yet I didn't want to frighten her needlessly; and I still had a sort of sense of loyalty to the Hawk and the expedition. I didn't know of anything wrong—I only suspected.

"Look here, Miss Teal, don't you know some responsible business man who could advise you about this investment—somebody you could talk it over with?"

"Why should I talk it over now? I've decided, and paid for my stock."

"But, even so, it might be well to get an opinion."

"I know one man—Mr. Shaw, the lawyer who settled my grandfather's estate; but I know he wouldn't approve. That's why I didn't ask his advice!"

She brought this out with a naive triumph that divided me between telling her she was a little fool and bursting into lamentations for my own responsibility. I compromised by asking:

"Will you promise me, if I should ever tell you it's necessary, to get Mr. Shaw's advice and follow it?"

"I think I'm competent to manage my own affairs," Letty said stiffly.

"But if it was important—tremendously important?"

"Well—if you asked me to. Now tell me some more about the ship and your voyages."

"I never sailed a voyage in my life. I've just wanted to, that's all, and been stuck fast in a dull little town, taking it all out in wishing."

"That's exactly my fix! But now you're going to hunt for treasure. Some people have all the luck!"

We talked a long time on the bench and on the way to the quiet little cottage where she lived with a widow woman, having no other home. I told her a lot about myself, and learned that she was an orphan, dependent on her earnings as a secretary, and all her money—her one nest-egg—tied up in the dubious schemes of those three precious gentlemen of the bark Hawk.

When we parted we were almost old friends.

"Remember," I said, "if I ask it, you're to go to Mr. Shaw at once."

"I promise that."

I had to run for it to catch the ship's boat, and George was swearing mad because I kept him waiting.

Not a word of George's grumblings penetrated to my consciousness. My mind was dazzled with the picture of Letty as I last saw her, waving a friendly good-by from over a hedge of hollyhocks.

VI

Bert Embee met me on deck.

"You're to take the dingey ashore at seven o'clock to fetch out Captain Blake," he said. Then he added, as George went forward: "Come here, Dair! Got something to tell you."

We went aft to the quarter-deck, where we were certain to be alone. Bert was more confidential and decidedly more ingratiating than he had been since we met in Eagle.

"Dair," he said, "it's all off. I got the low down on 'em this afternoon."

"What's all off?"

"The voyage—the ship—Crusoe Island—the whole works. It's all bunk, just as I've suspected for the last two weeks. Blake and Cashman and old Blye are a fine lot of crooks, selling stock in a fake gold-mine. I've been suspecting and listening and asking questions around for some time. The old hooker's owned by a man in Oakland, who chartered her to Blake & Co. for three months, not to sail a voyage, but just as bait for suckers. They had to have a ship to make the thing look real, and because the ship carries insurance they had to keep enough hands on her to protect her. That accounts for me and you and George. They had no more idea of sailing to Juan Fernandez than I have of jumping over the side. As for Spanish gold, that old rum-hound Blye dreamed it out of a bottle. They've made suckers out of us!"

I heard him out in a kind of numbness. I could only think of Letty Teal's thousand dollars. I said nothing.

"I suppose they thought they could play me for a good thing!" Bert burst out. "Well, I was wise all the time. I had a hunch. Of course I took the job. A man can hold his papers a long time without getting a first berth, and I wasn't passing up a chance; but they didn't put anything over on me with their yarn about treasure. It makes me sore the way they strung you, though!"

"Thanks, I can be sore on my own ac-

count," I said grimly. "They're a nice lot of scoundrels!"

Bert caught me up.

"Scoundrels! You said it. There's the whole thing. They'll double-cross you and George out of what's coming to you—the cook, too. Not a cent for any of us! Stock, that's all—stock that ain't worth the paper it's printed on. Are we going to stand for that?"

"What can we do?"

"Well"—Bert began to whisper—"here's the proposition. They made their plans this afternoon, and I heard 'em. They've got all they figure they can take safely, and to-night they split up. Cashman and Blye are gone already. Blake drew his out of the bank—that's what he went ashore for. He's coming back aboard to get a few things. My idea is that you'll fetch him and row him back. George and I will slip ashore ahead of you. It's dark on the docks, above the landing-float. See?"

From his side pocket Bert slipped a leather thong, weighted at one end—a deadly thing known as a slung-shot.

"I'm going to get what's coming to me!" he said meaningly. "So's George, and the cook. There's between fifteen and twenty thousand in that bag Blake's carrying. Do you want your share? I'm letting you in on it on account of old times. What d'you say?"

I didn't say anything. Bert's words turned me sick. The look in his face as he spoke made my flesh crawl.

As I stood hesitating there, I had a most illuminating glimpse of the end my dreams had brought me to, and I felt a hearty disgust with the unreasoning cruelty of life. I came to my adventure clean and got myself covered with muck through no fault of my own. A fine conclusion to my visions of sailing and treasure-hunting—three cheap frauds and their tawdry lie; the girl I loved involved through my own foolish enthusiasm; Bert Embee, my chum, proposing to make things worse by violence and theft!

Certainly my Snowden feet had led me deep into trouble!

"I know you're not a fool," Bert went on, when I said nothing. "We'll count on you. Meantime you'd better get a bite and go ashore in the dingey for the old man. Don't you worry, old son—we'll get what's coming to us to-night!"

There was one thing I had to do first of all, and Bert's mention of the dingey showed me how. I didn't stop for anything to eat. I rowed ashore and hurried to Letty Teal's boarding-place.

She was astonished to see me back so soon, but my face must have told her that it was serious business. She took the news about our three frauds without comment or fuss.

"Remember," I said, "Blake plans to abscond to-night. It's a matter of minutes, almost, if we're going to save anything. It's not only your money, Letty—it's the savings of lots of people who can afford to lose much less than you. Find Mr. Shaw, your lawyer. Tell him everything and follow his advice. He should know some way to stop them. You'll do that?"

"At once," she promised.

Even then I had to detain her for another moment.

"If you knew how utterly miserable I am!" I exclaimed. "If you knew how I blame myself for involving you in this!"

She seized me by the arms and made me face her.

"Whatever happens, I want you to know I don't blame you. More than that, I admire you, tremendously. I think those other Snowdens you told me about to-day would be proud of you!"

I ran back to the slip where the dingey waited, so lifted up by her words that I felt like an army.

Captain Blake was pacing the slip. He carried a leather grip-sack and was in a boiling temper with me for keeping him waiting.

When the captain had gone to his cabin, Bert met me in the waist.

"We're going ashore now—George and the cook and I. We'll be laying for him on the dock, don't fear. Remember, Dair, all you have to do is row him in and not let on you know anything. We're counting on you!"

If I had been properly a hero, I should have burst into violent protests and denounced Bert as a villain. I should have knocked him down for daring to suppose that I was as dirty a scoundrel as himself. As a matter of fact, I didn't do anything at all. To tell the truth, I was so sick and ashamed of what my friend had become that I couldn't find anything to say. I just nodded, and when Bert bade me "So-long," I answered in kind.

And that was the last I saw of Bert Embee, who for years had been one of my boyhood idols.

VII

For about two hours I was left alone on the Hawk's deck with the pains of my disillusionment and my worry about Letty Teal. Several times I went to spy on Captain Blake, and saw him gathering things into several traveling-bags. He worked with a guilty haste, and, the evening being warm, he was in a fine sweat in that stuffy cabin.

What I was praying for was help from ashore. Letty's lawyer friend would surely know what to do! He would know what levers to pull, and how to set the police in motion.

No boat or launch appeared. A clock in a church steeple sent its faint chime of nine out to me. I heard a door slam in the after cabin. The red fox must be nearly ready for his flight!

As I leaned over the bulwarks, my eyes straining the dark for sight of timely interference, I tried to think of some way to detain him.

A low hail from the black water under the counter made my hair rise up. It was Letty's voice!

A shadow crossed the blackness, and in a moment I saw her climbing the ladder. I drew her inboard, and before I could question I learned her news.

"I came by myself," she whispered, "in my canoe. I often paddle in the harbor. Dair, Mr. Shaw is out of the city. I didn't know what to do. I went to Haig, my boss in the life-insurance company, and told him. I think I scared him half to death. All he could think of was that I should see the county prosecutor in the morning, and bring you to him to swear to a warrant."

"Morning!" I groaned. "He's getting away to-night—now! We've got to stop him, and—"

Captain Blake's voice, hailing from the poop, interrupted me.

"Snowden! Come aft here and give me a hand with some bags. Shake a leg, you—"

I seized Letty.

"Over the side with you! Paddle ashore and wait for me at your house. I'll come there!"

"No!" She was struggling. "What are you going to do?"

"Something — I don't know — but he's not going to get away. Hurry, please!"

"I won't!" she said, wriggling out of my grasp. "I'm going to see it through!"

"Snowden!" Blake's voice bayed through the darkness. "You damned lazy bum, come aft!"

"Coming, sir! Letty," I pleaded, "will you be sensible? Get off this ship!"

"No! You'll do something foolish. I'm not going away and let him murder you!"

"Have I got to come fetch you, Snowden? I'll give you something to moon about!"

Blake loomed at the break of the poop. I turned and ran toward him.

"Right here!" I announced.

He still clung to the leather hand-bag—the bag that proved later to contain his share of their stealings. I followed him below and picked up two heavy suit-cases he had packed. As we came out of the companionway, Blake met Letty face to face.

"Who the devil?" he barked.

"One of your stockholders, Captain Blake, come to demand an accounting!"

She was cool as ice-water, facing him with a smile. The unexpectedness of it, and her audacity, brought him up short.

"This isn't the time or place to talk business, miss," Blake stammered, trying to control his impatience. "To-morrow—"

"Now," Letty said firmly. "I want an explanation—"

"Oh, damn it! Well, come below, if you please."

Then I interfered.

"Stay where you are, Miss Teal. He can talk here."

"Get out of this, you fool!" Blake barked at me.

"I'm in it to the finish," I replied.

He gaped a few seconds before he roared for Bert and George to seize me. I told him it was no use.

"They're ashore, waiting for you now—with a slung-shot. They want what's in that bag; but they won't get it. We're going to take that for the stockholders!"

Then Blake did stare!

"Well!" he gasped dryly. "Thanks for your information. Now both of you stand away, or—"

"You're a fraud and a cheat!" Letty charged, her blue eyes snapping. "You're a swindler! There isn't any buried gold on Juan Fernandez!"

"Prove it," Blake answered coolly.

"Your expedition is a cheat. You never meant to sail!"

"Prove it!"

"You collected this money and you're trying to run away with it. We know all your plans!"

"Yes, and we're going to change them," I added.

Blake ignored me. To Letty he rasped:

"Look here, young woman, I'm a patient man, but this is too strong. If you believe what you say, you can hire a lawyer to protect you. Now get out of my way before you get hurt!"

As he lunged toward Letty I leaped for him, aiming my fist for his jaw; but Blake was no tyro. Rough-and-tumble fighting was part of his trade.

He dodged my blow, which went wild. While I hung in the wind, thrown off my balance, he replied with a fist that sent me reeling against the rail, where I hung like a sack.

That blow woke the devil in the man. I heard his shout of rage—a cry that was not human—and I knew he had whipped a pistol from his pocket, though from the blow and the wind knocked out of me I hung helpless as a child over the rail.

It was Letty who seized Blake's pistol hand and stopped the murder.

"You don't dare do it, unless you kill us both!" she told him.

They stared at each other, and both of our lives hung in the balance. Blake suddenly flung her aside, and, snatching his precious bag, ran toward the waist of the ship.

Letty's voice roused me.

"Dair! Dair! Stop him!"

I staggered after Blake and reached the rail in time to see him pushing off the dingey. That cleared my head. I jumped from the rail and landed sprawling in the boat, which dipped itself half full of water.

Blake was thrown off his balance, and we sprawled together for a moment before he was on his knees and the pistol was talking.

A bullet sang past my ear. A second went wild, thanks to the boat's thrashing about. Before he fired again, I had found the leather bag on the seat between us and brought its hard corner down on his head with all my strength. Blake flattened out very still.

VIII

I WAS reminded of all this in a startling way just recently. Dair, Jr., who is past his eleventh birthday, looked up from his school-books and said:

"When I grow up I'm going to be a pirate and sink ships, like I saw at the movies."

I began to smile tolerantly until I saw his mother's face. Her look made me think of my own mother.

"Son," I said seriously, "I tried it once, and it doesn't pay. It's all hard work, disappointment, and grief. Find your treasure in the gold of some girl's hair—that's where I found mine—and stick to Fordby and honest work."

Dair's eyes blazed with scorn of us.

"Hunh! This mud-hole! The minute I'm old enough, I'll get out of here. You'll never see me again, either — see if you do!"

He flung out of the room and left us scared and hurt. His Snowden feet are showing early.

I think I know now why my mother cried.

A LOVER'S MADRIGAL

THAT I am thine, that thou art mine—
  That is my tender plea;
So henceforth let life intertwine
This love of mine with love of thine,
  In grief as well as glee.

That I am thine, that thou art mine,
  I fain repeat to thee;
Thy heart my heart must e'er confine—
A locked-in, lifelong valentine,
  And lost fore'er the key!

Walter Hart Blumenthal

Paula Parker's Disappearance

THE STORY OF A NINE DAYS' WONDER IN THE THEATRICAL WORLD

By Howard P. Rockey

IN the vast blackness behind the stage, Jack Harmon fumbled for a cigarette as he heard the dainty tripping of Paula Parker coming down the iron stairway from the chorus dressing-room. She stopped abruptly beneath a solitary electric bulb at the foot of the spiral, and, for the thousandth time, Harmon looked upon the patrician features of the only show-girl whom in his ten years of press-agentry he had ever cared to ask to an after-performance supper.

"Little old taxi's waiting at the usual stand around the corner," he laughed into her bewitching eyes. "My Pierce-Arrow's on the seventeenth floor of the garage, waiting to get its brakes manicured."

"Don't be an eternal idiot!" begged Paula, as her tiny gloved hand slipped frankly into Harmon's. "I know this isn't payday, and I'm equally aware that the beautiful gasoline chariot you've promised to take me out in is still in the blue-print stage. If you have enough loose change to buy me a crab-meat salad at the Claridge, I'll walk that far with you. If the exchequer isn't that high, we'll compromise on Child's."

"Oh, what a pal was Paula!" parodied Harmon, as he slipped his arm through the girl's and led her down the concrete passage toward the side street leading to Broadway.

He felt her little hand return his gentle pressure, and again he caught the flash of her eyes as they turned the corner into the after-theater crowd that floods the sidewalks of New York's Great White Way.

Those eyes, with their friendly message of comradeship, were the undoing of Jack Harmon. Wrapped in their beauty, he utterly failed to observe the stand of a vendor of apples and chewing-gum, and to his intense disconcertment he brushed against the flimsy affair and upset it.

Its proprietress was a hag of shriveled figure and wrinkled face. Across her left cheek was a scar that made her appearance still more pitiable and elicited coins from charitable passers-by who would never have thought of purchasing her wares. Harmon had noticed her at the corner many and many a time, grimacing at short-skirted girls and shorter-visioned men.

As the contents of the hag's stand rolled across the pavement and slid beneath the wheels of passing motor-cars, he listened to a stream of profanity that was as dynamic as it was inelegant.

Paula Parker flushed as a crowd gathered, but she quickly made herself mistress of the situation.

"Pay her for what she has lost, Jack," she advised, "and then let's get away from here. The tips of my ears don't need rouge under such a flow of billingsgate!"

Harmon flushed, and his hand slid hopelessly into his trouser-pocket, where a few rag-like bills were tucked. Paula quickly sensed his predicament, and her gold-mesh purse opened promptly as her kid-clad fingers drew forth a roll of bills.

"Will twenty dollars repay you?" she asked of the apple-woman, whose bony fingers quickly grasped the crinkly bill.

Broadway speedily forgot the incident, but neither Harmon nor Paula seemed to be able to banish it from their minds. They crossed the street in silence, and a few moments later were before the entrance of the Claridge. Then, at the last moment, Paula balked.

"Jack," she said very softly, "would you care if I changed my mind and went home to Mrs. O'Callaghan's select boarding-house? Somehow things haven't gone

right the last few days, and I'm rather sick of the whole game. I wanted to have a little chat with you to-night amid pleasant surroundings, and over a bite of food; but this apple-incident has made me change my mind. I want to hurry off to my little one-room-and-no-bath apartment, with every modern convenience unprovided."

Harmon was disappointed, but he knew Paula too well to be surprised.

"You're tired, girl—that's the trouble," he said considerately.

"A little," she confessed. "You know that I'm not a jazz enthusiast, and that I'm serious-minded now and then. To-night—I don't just know why—I want to *think*."

II

THAT was Tuesday about ten minutes before midnight. On Friday morning the front page of every newspaper in New York printed a double-column spread flaming the name of Paula Parker. Over the ensuing week-end Manhattan marveled about the beautiful chorus girl missing from the ranks of the season's hit, "Pretty Peggy." It seemed that she had disappeared from her lodging-house, and that no one knew where she had gone, or why.

After a day or two, however, Paula's name faded from the press as a heroine fades from a close-up in the movies. Blasé apartment-dwellers added her name to the long list of fade-aways of young femininity, and the musical comedy "Pretty Peggy" sang and danced its way merrily on, without its absent member.

Only Jack Harmon was broken-hearted. He was disgusted with himself at the stories that he, as press-agent for the show, had to give out to the newspapers, and he was intensely eager for real news about Paula Parker.

He knew her too well to believe that discouragement could have resulted in suicide. He knew that Paula had a tiny income of her own—more than her chorus-girl's salary. He knew that she was an orphan, a graduate of a select finishing-school, and that she had come to New York fired with footlight ambition. And he was also aware that he loved her, and had hoped to make her his wife.

Now, as he turned into Broadway once more—and this time, alone—the blinking electric signs seemed to mock him. The police had proved apathetic. Such disappearances were too frequent to be interesting. Yet he charged himself with negligence because he had found no clue to the mystery that was making him so miserable.

True, he had talked with Mrs. O'Callaghan, but the interview had brought forth only a confirmation of what he already knew. The landlady had seen the girl come in on Tuesday night. Paula had gone up-stairs. She owed no money, and her trunk was still in her room; yet she had vanished completely, without leaving a trace behind her—not even a message for Harmon.

He paused on the very corner that stood out so vividly in his memory. There sat the hag behind her fruit-stand. Harmon remembered the well-filled purse that Paula had displayed when she paid for the woman's loss because of his own impecuniousness. Suddenly a suspicion crystallized in his mind—yet it seemed absurd.

Trying to justify his half-formed idea, he paused and purchased an apple, which he quietly munched as the light-hearted Broadway crowd flowed past him. The hag was observing him narrowly, and seemed to draw into her crumbling shell, as if resenting his presence, or even dreading it. He turned upon the woman when she least expected it.

"Do you remember me?" he demanded.

The hag nodded with a grin which made her scar more hideous.

"Do you remember the girl who paid you so liberally for the damage I did last Tuesday night?"

"Sure!" chuckled the apple-woman. "She was pretty and kind. What happened to her? I seen her name in the papers—and her picture, too."

Tears came into the woman's eyes. Harmon was astounded that such genuine emotion could manifest itself in so repulsive a creature.

"I wish I knew!" Harmon answered, as he turned away, sick at heart, and with his foolish suspicion disproved.

Hardly seeing what he did or realizing where he went, he stepped off the curb and narrowly escaped being run down by a cruising taxicab. He looked up, startled, into the eyes of the chauffeur.

"Get in!" said the man peremptorily, yet in a whisper that was lost amid the roar of traffic.

Harmon stared at the fellow—a rough-looking pirate. Then, as if in a dream, he

turned the handle, opened the door, and stepped into the taxi. A police whistle blew, and the machine shot through a cross street, going eastward.

For several blocks past Fifth Avenue the nighthawk drove his cab. Then he slowed down and called to Harmon to join him on the outside seat.

"I don't know why I want to tell you what I'm going to slip over," the chauffeur said, as he speeded up the taxi; "but I know you're a regular fellow, and you'll keep me out of this business. I took Paula Parker away in this very cab on the night she never came back—"

Harmon's arms gripped the chauffeur's nearest one.

"You did *what?*" he demanded.

The man nodded as he swerved southward into Second Avenue.

"Where did you take her?" Harmon shot at him, unable to believe that he heard rightly.

"To a bootlegging saloon — with your friend Apple Mary," the driver replied. "At first I thought you were in on the deal; then I knew you couldn't be. You're in love with that girl, ain't you?"

Harmon nodded emphatically.

"Apple Mary?" he queried. "You don't mean—"

"That crooked old beggar who sits at the corner where I picked you up," the chauffeur went on. "It's true," he added, as Harmon stared at him, still unable to give full credence to the tale. "I'm giving you straight goods. If you peach on me, I'll croak you sure, for Apple Mary has enough on me to hang me. That's why I hate her!"

"Tell me the whole story," Harmon said quietly, as the machine cruised slowly down-town.

III

"THE night you upset the apple-stand," the chauffeur proceeded, "I thought I saw the chance of a fare, and I followed you and the girl up the street. I'd caught a glimpse of her wad, and when you two turned into Forty-Seventh Street I followed close to the curb. You said good night, and the girl went into a house with high brownstone steps. Then I knew I was wasting time, and I beat it back to Broadway. Apple Mary was standing at the entrance to the subway—alone. Then, out of the crowd, I saw the girl you left hurry up and grab the old woman's arm. I stopped a minute. They seemed to be having an argument. Then your girl beckoned to me, and both of them got into my cab."

"What then?" Harmon shot at him.

"Then I took them to the bootlegging place Mary goes to when she—"

"Where is it?" demanded Harmon.

"I'll take you there, if you like," the chauffeur said. Even as he spoke, they were coming within the shadow of the narrow, dark, damp streets that lie beneath the Brooklyn Bridge. "I don't know that what I'm saying will get you anything, but if you want to find your girl—well, keep mum about me!"

"What you tell me is sacred," promised Harmon, and as the chauffeur drew up alongside the curb he handed Harmon a thumb-worn card.

"Give that to Danny in the saloon on the corner. Buy a drink or two, and see what happens," the driver said, and, stepping on the gas, was off with a roar at full speed.

Harmon did as he was told, and found himself in the back room of a dirty, disreputable-looking place with two rather forbidding men and a faded woman sitting at a table. The chauffeur's card secured him a glass of brown-colored liquid which he dared not taste, and which cost him half a dollar. His pulses were pounding fast, and he was upbraiding himself for being a fool, when, after nearly an hour, the door through which he had entered opened again, and in came Apple Mary.

He watched her covertly, fearing that she would recognize him; but evidently the woman had knowledge of other thirst-relieving stations on the way down-town, for she was at least half-drunk. Yet Harmon took no chances. Watching his opportunity, he slipped from the room, to wait outside in the shadow until the sodden hag should come out. In less than fifteen minutes he saw her sway from the place, and make her way uncertainly along the street.

Once, when she had steadied herself beneath a street-lamp, Harmon caught the bleared look of her eyes, now wild with the fire of the doubtful liquor she had taken. A moment later she started off on her course, having taken occasion to greet a passer-by with a horrible stream of vulgarity.

A few paces farther on she lurched into a doorway. Harmon, momentarily hesitat-

ing to decide his best course, welcomed the approach of a policeman. He accosted the bluecoat, displayed his card, and hastily told of his mission. The patrolman was skeptical at first; but, knowing of Paula Parker's disappearance, he was naturally eager to win credit by solving the mystery. He signed to Harmon to follow him, and hastily entered the building.

At the top of a steep stair a door slammed in their faces. Repeated rappings brought no response, other than cautious scuffling within and muffled oaths. The policeman was still doubtful, but Harmon was insistent, and a moment later, with shoulders in unison, the two men sent the decrepit door reeling from its hinges.

In the middle of the disordered floor stood the hag herself, leering at them. It seemed to Harmon that he had never gazed upon a creature so hideous. Then the disheveled creature flew at the policeman, her long, dirty finger-nails reaching for his throat. The officer caught her with vise-like grip, and hurled her to a dirty tangle of quilts in a corner of the room.

She lay there a crumpled figure, and loud screams of insane laughter came from her shriveled lips. Presently she raised her head, and yellow fangs snarled from her mouth to make the scarred face more repulsive.

"You're smart ones!" She punctuated her beratings with curses. "You think you can make me tell where *she* is!" Her laughter was maddening. "But you can't! And if I did, what a sight you'd find!"

She crawled to her feet and staggered over to a rickety stand of drawers. From one of them, with a broken knob, she drew a pair of cobwebby silk stockings, the dainty slippers that had tapped down the dressing-room stairway on the night of Paula's disappearance, and finally the gold-mesh purse, which fell at Harmon's feet, empty.

The two took the raving hag to the precinct station, and detectives were sent to search the tenement and question the other occupants. No trace of Paula, living or dead, could be found in the place.

Harmon telephoned to Brompton, manager of the "Pretty Peggy" company, and to Paula's landlady, Mrs. O'Callaghan. In the early dawn of the morning, as the examining official arrived, the two were in the tiny court-room whispering with Harmon.

A turnkey led Apple Mary in, and placed her in the prisoner's dock. Her eyes flashed wildly upon the group, and her laugh was horrible to hear.

"Yes, I killed her!" she confessed. "You'll never know how I did it. She was pretty and rich, and I'm old and poor and ugly—and I hated her!"

Suddenly she became silent. Her shriveled body seemed to tremble, and she bowed her face in her hands, apparently overcome with emotion, or perhaps remorse. Then she straightened up again. In her hand was a rag which she rapidly wiped across her face. Presto, the wrinkles and the scar vanished, gone were the fang-like teeth, and the pretty, pale face of Paula Parker looked smilingly across the room at Harmon.

"Poor old Apple Mary!" laughed the softer tones of Paula herself. "I suppose she must be dying of ennui out on my Westchester farm!"

Harmon stared as if he were viewing a ghost, and the manager looked at the girl with bulging eyes.

"I suppose everybody will be frightfully angry with me," Paula went on, looking demurely at the police official; "but Brompton, over there, told me that I couldn't act, and refused to give me a part. I was tired of being nothing but a show-girl, so I bribed the old apple-seller to let me impersonate her for a week or so and pose as my own murderess."

The official chuckled, and the patrolman tried to hide his chagrin behind a smile.

"You mean that you're really alive, and that you were only *acting?*" demanded Harmon, incredulous.

Paula shrugged her shoulders and gave him a pretty, pouting, forgiveness-begging look of pleading.

"Don't you really think I'm a pretty good actress?" she asked a little proudly. "I fooled even *you,* when I sat behind the apple-stand myself and let you question me. I fooled you again in the saloon—and there they all believed I was Apple Mary, too. I fooled you and the policeman in the tenement, and—"

Brompton reached into his waistcoat for his fountain pen.

"Come around from behind that railing, and let's draw up a contract, so I can give you a part in a regular play before some other manager offers you more money than I can afford to pay!" the manager said.

Midnight*

A MYSTERY OF MATCHED WITS AND CROSSING TRAILS

By Octavus Roy Cohen

Author of "The Crimson Alibi," "Gray Dusk," etc.

ON a bitter winter night, with a sleet storm raging, Spike Walters, taxi-driver, picks up a fare at the Union Station—a well-dressed woman, who tells him to take her to 981 East End Avenue. Arriving there, the driver finds that his passenger has disappeared, and makes the still more surprising discovery that on the floor of his cab is the body of a man who has been shot to death. Walters reports to the police, and the dead man is identified as Rowland Warren, a prominent figure in local society.

The case is taken in hand by Eric Leverage, chief of police, and his friend, David Carroll, a student of crime and its detection; but they find the mystery of Warren's death a puzzling one. They learn that he had sublet his apartment, discharged his valet, and bought two tickets for New York. From these facts, and from Warren's reputation as a man of gallantries, they infer that he had planned an elopement with some unknown woman—in spite of the fact that he was engaged to be married.

One theory, hinted at by the newspapers, is that he was killed by his fiancée, Hazel Gresham; but a girl friend of Miss Gresham's, Evelyn Rogers, assures Carroll that this cannot be true, as she was at home with Hazel during the night of the murder. Evelyn lives with her sister Naomi, who is the wife of Gerald Lawrence, and Warren was a frequent visitor at their house. On the chance of getting further information from the talkative girl, Carroll cultivates her acquaintance. Driving her home in his car, he sees William Barker, Warren's discharged valet, coming out of the Lawrences' house—an incident which he regards as significant, though when he and Leverage talk with Barker they get nothing out of him.

XII

AT four o'clock the following afternoon Carroll received from Chief Leverage a report on Gerald Lawrence.

"He's a manufacturer," said Leverage. "President of the Capital City Woolen Mills. Rated about a hundred thousand—maybe a little more. He's on the board of directors of the Second National. Has the reputation of being hard, fearless, and considerable of a grouch. Age forty-two. Married Naomi Rogers about five years ago. She was twenty-five then—thirty now. Supposed to be beautiful, and would be a society light except that Lawrence doesn't care for the soup-and-fish stuff. Report has it that they're not very happy together. His parents and hers all dead. Evelyn, her kid sister, lives with them. They employ a cook and two maids—no man servants at all.

"Roland Warren was pretty intimate at the Lawrence house, but so far as I can discover there was no scandal linking the names of Warren and Mrs. Lawrence. Of course, him knowing her pretty intimately and being friendly at the house, you could probably find people who would say nasty things; but there hasn't been the real gossip about her and him that there was about a heap of other women in this town. Warren and Lawrence were pretty good friends, and Warren was a stockholder in the woolen mills. On the other hand, it seems as if Warren was at the house a good deal more than just ordinary friendship would have indicated; but that's merely an idea. And there's your dope—"

"And on the night of the murder?" questioned Carroll. "Where were they then?"

"Mrs. Lawrence was at home. Lawrence—if you're thinking of him in connection with it—seems to have an iron-clad alibi. He went to Nashville on a business trip and didn't get back until the following morning."

"Alibi, eh?" Carroll's eyes narrowed speculatively. "Are you *sure* he was in Nashville all that time?"

"H-m!" Leverage shook his head. "I don't know, but I can find out."

Carroll rose.

"Do it, please, and get the dope straight."

Carroll went to his apartment, where he reluctantly commenced dressing for the ordeal of the night. He felt himself rather ridiculous—a man of his age calling on a girl not yet out of high school. The thing was funny, of course; but just at the moment the joke was too entirely on him for the full measure of amusement.

At that, he dressed carefully, selecting for the occasion a new gray suit, a white jersey-silk shirt, and a blue necktie. At half past six Freda served his dinner, and at fifteen minutes after eight o'clock he rang the bell of the Lawrence home.

The door was opened by Evelyn, palpitant with excitement, and garbed attractively in the demi-toilette of very young ladyhood.

"Mr. Carroll—so good of you to come! I'm simply tickled to death. Let me have your hat and coat. Come right into the living-room — I want you to meet my brother-in-law and my sister."

Sheepishly, Carroll followed the girl into the room. Mr. and Mrs. Lawrence rose politely to greet him.

At sight of the man he had really come to see, Carroll was conscious of an instinctive dislike. Lawrence was of medium height, slightly stooped, and not unpleasing to the eye; but his brows were inclined to lower, and the eyes themselves were set too close together. He was dressed plainly, almost harshly, and he stared at Carroll in a manner bordering on the hostile.

The detective acknowledged the introduction and then turned his gaze upon the woman of the family. There he met with a surprise as pleasant as his first impression of Lawrence had been unpleasant.

There was no gainsaying the fact that Naomi Lawrence was a beautiful woman. Dressed simply for an evening at home, in a strikingly plain gown of a rich black material, and with her magnificent neck and shoulders rising above the midnight hue, she caused a spontaneous thrill of masculine admiration to surge through the ordinarily immune visitor in the gray suit.

Her face was almost classic in its contour; her hair was blue-black, her coloring that of a rich brunette. No jewelry, save an engagement ring, adorned her perfect beauty. Carroll felt a loathing at the idea that this magnificent creature was the wife of the stoop-shouldered, sour-faced man who stood scowling by the living-room table.

He gravely acknowledged the introduction of the young lady upon whom he had called, feeling a faint sense of amusement at Lawrence's overt disdain and a considerable embarrassment under Naomi's questioning, level gaze. For a few moments they talked casually; but that did not satisfy Evelyn, and she dragged him into the parlor.

"Just the elegantest jazz piece!" Carroll heard as through a haze. "Just got it—feet can't keep still—play it for you!"

He found himself standing by the piano, with the door between the music-room and living-room unaccountably closed, and Evelyn banging out the opening measures of the "elegantest jazz piece."

He was still staring moodily at the closed door when the din ceased and he again heard Evelyn's voice.

"A penny for your thoughts, Mr. Carroll—a real, honest-to-goodness, spendable penny!"

"I was thinking," he remarked quietly, "that your sister is a very beautiful woman."

"Naomi? Shucks! She isn't bad-looking, but she's *old*—abominably old! She's thirty!"

He glanced down on the girl and smiled.

"That does seem old to you, doesn't it?"

"Treacherously! I don't know what I'd ever do if I was to get that old. Take up crocheting, probably."

The conversation died of dry-rot. Carroll was not at all pleased. His excuse—the plea that he had come to call upon Evelyn—had been taken too literally. In his blithe ignorance of the seventeen-year-old ladies of the present day he had fancied that he could engineer himself into a worthwhile conversation with the Lawrences.

Since meeting them, he was doubly anxious. The man showed a thinly veiled hostility which demanded investigation. About the woman there was a subtle atmosphere of tragedy which appealed to the masculine protectiveness that surged strong in Carroll's bachelor breast.

But the detective was a sportsman. The girl had carried things her own way, and he was too game to spoil her evening. Therefore he temporarily gave over all

thought of a chat with the Lawrences and devoted himself to her amusement. He told her that the jazz music she had strummed was simply "glorious," and that he regretted he knew very little popular stuff. She leaped upon his remark.

"Oh, do *you* play—*really?*"

He was in again.

"I have played—a little."

"I wonder if you would! Here's the *grandest* little old song I bought downtown this morning."

She placed on the piano a gaudy thing with the modest title, "All Babies Need Daddies to Kiss 'Em." Its cover exposed a tender love scene wherein a gentleman in evening clothes was engaged in an act of violent osculation with a young lady whose dress was as short as her modesty. Carroll shrugged, placed his long, slender fingers on the keys, shook his head — and went to it.

He played! A genuine artist, he tried to enter into the spirit of the thing, and succeeded admirably. The itchy syncopation rocked the room. His hostess snapped her fingers in delight and executed a few movements of a dance which Carroll had heard vaguely referred to as the shimmy. In the midst of the revelry he gave thought to Eric Leverage and chuckled.

He played the chorus a second time—then stopped on a crashing chord. Evelyn's face was beaming.

"Gracious! You *can* play, can't you?"

"I used to. Suppose we talk a while?"

She reluctantly agreed. They seated themselves in easy chairs before the gas-logs. Evelyn glanced hopefully at the chandelier.

"I wish the belt would slip at the power-house, don't you?"

"Why?" Carroll asked innocently.

"Oh, just because! Bright lights are such a nuisance when a girl has a fellow calling on her; and these logs give a perfectly respectable light, don't they?"

"Indeed they do; but perhaps we'd better leave the others on."

She sighed resignedly.

"I guess we'd better. Sis is so darned proper, and Gerald is such an old crab—they might say something."

"I suppose they might. By the way, didn't they think it was—er—strange my coming to see you to-night?"

She turned red.

"Suppose they did, what difference does that make? I'm not a child, and if a gentleman wants to call on me I guess they haven't got any kick."

"What did they say when you told them I was coming?"

"They didn't believe me at first. Then sis said you were too old; but you're not old at all. Gerald said—he said—"

She paused, giggling.

"What did Gerald say?" Carroll asked.

"He said, 'Damned impertinence!'"

"H-m! I wonder just what he meant!"

"Oh, goodness! It doesn't matter what Gerald means. He makes me weary. He's simply *impossible*. I can't see what sis ever married him for."

"I suppose she saw more in him than you do. They must be very happy together, I should think."

"Happy? Poof! Happy as two dead sardines in a can. They can't get out, so they might as well be happy. Besides, he's away a good deal."

"He is, eh? When was his last out-of-town trip?"

Carroll was interested now. He had steered the conversation back to matters of importance.

"Oh, about four days ago—you know, the day dear Roland was killed by that vampire in the taxicab."

"He was away that night—all night?"

"Yes, all night long. And would you believe that sis, who is scared of her shadow at night, was the one who suggested that I should go and spend the night with Hazel? It's certainly fortunate she did, because if she hadn't I wouldn't have been with Hazel all night, and you awful detectives would probably have disbelieved her story that she was at home in bed. Then you would have arrested her for murdering Roland, and she'd have gone to jail and been hanged or something, wouldn't she?"

"Hardly as bad as that; but it was fortunate that you were there. It made the establishing of the alibi a very simple matter. And you say your sister—Mrs. Lawrence—is nervous at night?"

"Oh, fearfully! She's just like all women—scared of rats, scared of the dark, scared of being alone. Perfectly disgusting, I call it."

"Quite a few women are that way, though."

"I'm not. I'm scared of snakes, and flying bugs, and things like that; but I don't get scared of the dark. Who's going

to hurt you? That's what I always say. I believe in figuring things out, don't you? I read in a book once where—"

"But maybe you do Mrs. Lawrence an injustice. Maybe she isn't so much afraid at night as you imagine."

"She is, too."

"Yet you say she let you spend the night at Miss Gresham's house when Mr. Lawrence was out of the city and there wasn't anybody on the place but the servants."

"Worse than that—the servants don't even live on the place. She spent the night here all alone!"

"Then all I'll say is that she is a brave woman. When did Mr. Lawrence get back from Nashville?"

"Not until ten o'clock the following morning. Believe me, he was all excited when he read about Roland in the papers. Poor Roland! If you were only a girl, Mr. Carroll, you'd know how terrible it is to have a man who's crazy about you, and engaged to your best friend, go and get himself murdered. Why, when I read the papers that morning, I could hardly believe my own eyes. I just said to myself, 'It can't be! I'll bet everything I have that he ain't really dead!' I said it over and over again, just like that. Having faith, I think they call it. I was reading in a book once about having faith—"

She talked interminably. Carroll ceased to hear the chattering voice. He was thinking of what she had just told him—thinking earnestly. He was desperately anxious to have a talk with the Lawrences; and tonight was his opportunity. He was not likely to have another like it. He didn't want to be forced to seek them out in his capacity of detective.

From somewhere in the rear of the house he heard the clamor of a door-bell, then the sound of footsteps in the hall, the opening and closing of the front door—and then Naomi Lawrence appeared in the music-room. Carroll could have sworn that her eyes were twinkling with amusement as she addressed Evelyn, pointedly ignoring him.

"Evelyn, that Somerville boy is here."

"Oh, bother! What's he doing here?"

"He says he came to call. He's got a box of candy."

"Piffle! What do I care about candy? He's just a kid!"

Naomi went to the hall door.

"Right this way, Charley."

As the slender, overdressed young gentleman of nineteen entered the room, Carroll again glimpsed the light of amusement in Naomi's eyes.

Mr. Charley Somerville expressed himself as being "pleaset'meetcha," and tried to conceal his vast admiration when Evelyn informed him that this was *the* David Carroll. Charley was impressed, but he was not particular about showing it. He fancied himself very much of a cosmopolite, thanks to a year at Yale. His dignity was excruciatingly funny to Carroll as the very young man seated himself, crossed one elongated and unbelievably skinny leg over the other, and arranged the creases of his trousers so that they were in the very middle.

"A-a-ah! You're taking a vacation from your work on the Warren murder case, I presume?"

Carroll nodded.

"Yes—for a while."

"Detective work must be a terrible bore, isn't it?"

"It is indeed — sometimes," answered Carroll significantly.

"Charley Somerville!" Evelyn flamed to the defense of her friend's profession. "At least Mr. Carroll ain't—isn't—a college freshman!"

"I'm a sophomore," asserted Charley languidly. "Passed all of my exams."

"Anyway," snapped Evelyn, "he ain't any kid!"

For a few minutes the atmosphere was strained. Then Carroll recalled a college joke he knew, and he told it well. After which Evelyn explained to Charley that Mr. Carroll was the most wonderful pianist in the world, and David Carroll, criminologist, strummed out several popular airs while the youngsters danced.

Annoying as the situation was, it appealed irresistibly to his sense of humor. He found himself almost enjoying it. He worked carefully, too, and eventually his patience was rewarded. He succeeded in getting the two youngsters together on a lounge with a photograph-album between them. Then, very quietly and positively, and with a brief "Excuse me for a moment," he walked through the hall and into the living-room.

Lawrence and his wife were reading on opposite sides of the library table. At sight of Carroll, Lawrence laid down his paper and rose to his feet.

"Well?" he inquired inhospitably.

Carroll laughed lightly.

"It got too much for me — too much youth. I dropped in here for a chat with you folks."

"I didn't understand that you had come to call on us," said Lawrence coldly.

"Why, I didn't—"

"You did!" snapped Lawrence. "I'm no fool, Carroll. From the minute I heard you were coming, I knew what you had up your sleeve. You wanted to talk about the Warren case! Now suppose you go ahead and talk, and then get out!"

XIII

CARROLL was rarely thrown from his mental balance, even momentarily, but this was one of the exceptions. His eyes half-closed in their clash with the coldly antagonistic orbs of his host. His instinctive dislike of the man flamed into open anger, and he controlled himself only by a supreme effort.

One thing Lawrence had done—he had stripped from Carroll his disguise as a casual caller and settled down ominously to hard facts. Carroll shrugged, forced a smile—then glanced at Naomi Lawrence.

She had risen, and was staring at her husband with wide-eyed indignation. Undoubtedly she was horrified at his bruskness. She, too, had made it plain that Carroll was not welcome, and that his ruse of calling upon Evelyn had been seen through plainly; but he could see that even under those circumstances she was not forgetful that he was a guest in her home and that, as such, he was entitled to receive ordinary courtesy.

Carroll was more than a little sorry for her, and also a bit rueful at his own plight. Things had gone wrong for him from the commencement of the evening; and now—well, the gage of battle had been flung in his face, and he was no man to refuse the challenge.

His muscles were taut until the soft voice of Naomi broke in on the pregnant stillness.

"Won't you be seated, Mr. Carroll?"

Carroll smiled gratefully. With her words the unpleasant tension had lightened. He dropped into an armchair. Lawrence followed suit, his close-set eyes focused belligerently on Carroll's face, the hostility of his manner being akin to a personal menace. Naomi stood by the table, her eyes shifting from one to the other.

"I'd rather," she suggested softly, "that we did not discuss the Warren case."

"It doesn't matter what you prefer," snapped her husband coldly. "Carroll forced himself upon us for that purpose, with a lack of decency which one might have expected. Let him have his say!"

Carroll gazed squarely at Lawrence.

"I'm sorry," he said, "that you see fit to act as you are doing."

"I didn't ask for any criticism of my conduct."

"Just the same, dear—" Naomi began.

"Nor any apologies to him from you, Naomi," her husband interrupted angrily. "Carroll has placed himself beyond the pale by his impertinence in foisting himself upon us as a social equal. Now, Carroll, are you ready with your catechism?"

"Yes." The detective's voice was quite calm. "I'm quite ready."

"Well, go ahead!" Lawrence paused. "You *did* come here to inquire about Warren, didn't you?"

Carroll could not forbear a dig.

"I trust that you are not putting it upon me to deny your statement?"

"I don't give a damn what you deny or affirm."

"Good! Then we know all about each other, don't we? You know that I am a detective in search of information, and I know absolutely what you are." The dart went home. Lawrence moved uneasily in his chair. "So I'll come right to the point. Is it not a fact that you were in this city at the hour when Roland Warren is supposed to have been killed?"

He heard a surprised gasp from Naomi, and saw that her face had blanched, and that she was leaning forward with eyes wide and hands clutching the arms of the chair in which she had seated herself.

Lawrence leered.

"As the kids would say, Carroll, that's for me to know and for you, super-detective that you are, to find out!"

Carroll was more at ease now. Lawrence's sneering aggressiveness brought him into his own element, and he was hitting straight from the shoulder, refusing point-blank to mince matters.

"I fancy I can," he returned calmly. "I must ask you another question—is it not a fact that you disliked Warren, even though you pretended to be his friend?"

"That, too, is my business, Carroll. Do you think I'm going to feed pap to you?"

Carroll reflected for a moment. Then suddenly his voice crackled across the room.

"You know, of course, that you are suspected of Warren's murder?"

Silence! Then a forced, sickly grin creased Lawrence's lips; but his figure collapsed, almost cringed. From Naomi came a choked gasp.

"Mr. Carroll! Not Gerald!"

Carroll paid no heed to the woman. He sat back in his chair, his eyes never for one moment leaving Lawrence's pallid face. Nor did Carroll speak again. He waited. It was Lawrence who broke the silence.

"Is—this—what you—detectives — call the third degree?"

"It is not. Now get this straight, Lawrence—I came here to find out what you know about Warren and the circumstances surrounding his death. I wanted to be decent about the thing—to cause you no embarrassment, if I was convinced that you were unconnected with the crime. You have forced my hand. You have driven me to methods which I abhor."

"You haven't a thing on me," said Lawrence, but his tone had degenerated into a whine. "You can't scare me a little bit. I've got an alibi."

"Certainly you have. So, too, had a good many men who have eventually been proved guilty."

Lawrence rose nervously and paced the room.

"You asked me a little while ago if I was in this city at the hour when the crime was committed. I answered that it was for me to know and for you to find out. I'll answer direct now, just to stop this absurd suspicion which has been directed against me: I was *not* in the city at that hour, or within six hours of midnight. I was in Nashville."

"At what hotel?"

"At the—" Lawrence paused. "Matter of fact, I wasn't at any hotel."

"You had registered at the Hermitage, hadn't you?"

"Yes, but—"

"When did you check out?"

Carroll's voice was snapping out with staccato insistence.

"About four o'clock in the afternoon," Lawrence replied.

"Where did you go? Where did you spend the night?"

Lawrence shook his head helplessly.

"I'll be honest, Carroll. I took several drinks—"

"Alone?"

"Yes. And at two o'clock in the morning, when my train left, I was at the station. I don't know just what I did in the mean time. I don't remember anything much about anything."

"In other words," said Carroll coldly, "you have no alibi except your own word. On the other hand, we know that you checked out of the Hermitage Hotel in Nashville at four o'clock. You could have caught the train at twenty-five minutes past four and reached this city at ten minutes after eleven o'clock. You have not the slightest proof that you didn't."

"I—I came down on the train which left there a little after two in the morning."

"Prove it!"

There was a hunted look about Lawrence now.

"I can't prove it. A man can't prove that he came on a certain train."

"Was there nobody on board who knew you?"

"I—don't know. I was feeling badly when I got in. The berths were all made up. I went right to sleep, and when the porter woke me we were in the yards. I dressed and came right home."

"And yet" — Carroll was merciless— "you have no substantiation for your statements." He switched his line of attack suddenly. "What made you think I was coming here to discuss Roland Warren's death?"

It was plain that Lawrence did not want to answer; yet there was something in Carroll's mesmeric eyes which wrung words unwillingly from his lips.

"Just logic," he answered weakly. "I knew that you weren't calling to see Evelyn because you were interested in her. You knew Warren had been pretty friendly in this house, so you came to talk to us about it. Isn't that reasonable?"

"I don't believe I am here to answer questions, Mr. Lawrence. You invited me to ask them."

Naomi broke in, her voice choked with hysteria.

"What are you leading to, Mr. Carroll? It is absurd to think that Gerald had anything to do with Mr. Warren's death!"

Carroll swung on her, biting off his words shortly.

"Do you *know* that he didn't?"

"Yes, I think—"

"I didn't ask what you *thought*, Mrs. Lawrence. I am asking what you *know*."

"But if he was in Nashville—"

"If he was, then he's safe; but he himself cannot prove that he was. And I tell you frankly that the police will investigate his movements very carefully. It strikes me as exceedingly peculiar that he checked out from the Hermitage Hotel at four o'clock in the afternoon when he intended taking a train at two in the morning. Remember, I am accusing your husband of nothing. Our conversation could have been pleasant; he refused to allow it to be so. He classified me as a professional detective and put me on that basis in his home. I have merely accepted his invitation to act as one. If I appear discourteous, kindly recall that it was none of my own doing."

"I'm sorry, Carroll," said Lawrence pleadingly. "I didn't know—"

"Of course you didn't know how much I knew, or might guess. You saw fit to insult me."

"I've apologized."

"Your apologies come late, Lawrence—entirely too late. Our relations from now on are those of detective and suspect."

Again the flare of hate in Lawrence's manner.

"I don't have to prove an alibi, Carroll. You have to prove my connection with the thing, and you can't do it!"

"Why not?"

"Because I was in Nashville at that time; and while perhaps I can't prove I was there, you certainly cannot prove I was not."

"That remains to be seen. Meanwhile, I'd advise you to establish that fact if you can possibly do so. By the way, are you in the habit of indulging in these solitary debauches in neighboring cities?"

Lawrence flushed.

"Sometimes. I used to be a heavy drinker, and—"

"Is that a fact, Mrs. Lawrence?"

"Yes," she answered eagerly — almost too eagerly, Carroll thought. "He has had escapades like this—several times."

"And you are sure that his story is true?"

"Yes, of course I'm sure. Why should he kill Mr. Warren? There isn't any reason in the world."

"For your sake and his, I hope not; but meanwhile—"

"Surely, Mr. Carroll, you don't intend publishing what he has told you—about his drinking in Nashville?"

Carroll smiled.

"No, indeed. In the first place, I am not at all sure that he has told me the truth. In the second place, if I were sure of it, his alibi would be established, and I have no desire whatever to injure a man because of a personal weakness."

Lawrence stared at Carroll peculiarly.

"You mean that if I can prove the truth of my story, nothing will be made public about my—the affair in Nashville?"

"Absolutely. Because you have treated me discourteously, Lawrence, I don't consider myself justified in injuring your reputation. I am after the person or persons responsible for the death of Roland Warren. Your intimate weaknesses have no interest for either me or the public."

Lawrence was silent for a while.

"You're damned white, Carroll," he said at length. "The apologies I extended a moment ago, I repeat; and this time I'm sincere."

"And this time they are accepted."

"Meanwhile you are welcome here whenever you wish to call. Perhaps, by talking to me, you may establish the alibi which I know I have, but cannot prove."

Carroll rose and bowed.

"Thank you. And now—I'll go. If you will express my regrets to Miss Rogers—"

Naomi accompanied him to the door. She extended her hand.

"You're wrong, Mr. Carroll," she murmured. "Quite wrong!"

"You are sure?"

"I *know!* I fully believe his story."

"I hope to—soon; but just now, Mrs. Lawrence—" He saw tears in her fine eyes. "You have nothing to fear from me if he is innocent."

She pressed his hand gratefully, and then closed the door. Carroll, inhaling the bracing air of the winter night, proceeded briskly to the curb. Then, standing with one foot on the running-board of his car, he stared peculiarly at the big white house standing starkly in the moonlight.

"I wonder," he mused softly. "I wonder!"

XIV

CARROLL drove direct to his apartments, despite his original intention of dropping off at headquarters for a chat with Leverage. He wanted to be alone—to think.

The evening had borne fruit beyond his wildest imaginings. Fact had piled upon

fact with bewildering rapidity. As yet he had been unable to sort them in his mind, to catalogue each properly, to test for proper value.

He reached his apartment and found it warm and comfortable. He donned lounging-robe and slippers, which the thoughtful Freda had left out for him, settled himself in an easy chair, lighted a fire, which he always kept ready in the grate, and turned out the lights. Then, with his cigar glowing, and great clouds of rich smoke filling the air, he sank into a revelry of thinking.

Certain disclosures of the evening stood out with startling clarity. Chief among them was the inevitable belief that Gerald Lawrence had either killed Roland Warren, or knew who had done so and how it was done. Yet Carroll tried not to allow his thoughts and personal prejudices to run away with him. He knew that now, of all times, he must keep a tight grip on himself.

Great as was the dislike which he had conceived for Lawrence—an instinctive repugnance which still obtained—he was grimly determined that he would not be swayed by his emotions. Therefore he deliberately reviewed Lawrence's story in the light of its possible truth.

Lawrence claimed that he belonged to that none too small class of prominent citizens who at more or less regular intervals respond to the call of the wild within them by going to a near-by city, where they are not known, and giving themselves over to the dubious delights of a spree. Publication of this fact alone would prove sufficient to injure Lawrence socially and in the commercial world. The old case of the Spartan lad, Carroll reflected. The disgrace lay in being discovered!

Also, it was perfectly plain to Carroll that at the outset of his conversation Lawrence had been smugly satisfied that he was possessed of a perfect alibi. It was only under Carroll's merciless grilling that he had been abruptly forced to realize that he had no alibi whatever. The same logic applied there, as in Leverage's theory that Barker's arrest would be an excellent strategic move. All Carroll had to do now was to arrest Lawrence for Warren's murder, and the burden of proof would have been shifted from the shoulders of the detective to that of the suspect. It would then devolve upon Lawrence to prove an alibi that Carroll knew perfectly well he could not prove, save by merest accident.

But that was a procedure which Carroll abhorred. Those were police department methods—wholesale arrests in the hope of somewhere in the net trapping the prey. Such a course, as Carroll knew, had led to an enormous number of convictions of innocent men.

He had no desire to injure Lawrence, provided Lawrence was free of guilt in this particular instance. He didn't like the man—in fact, his feelings toward him amounted to a positive aversion; but through it all he tried to be fair-minded. Moreover, he could not quite rid himself of the picture of Naomi Lawrence. Carroll was far from impervious to the appeal of a beautiful woman.

So much for the probable truth of Lawrence's story. The reverse side of the picture presented an entirely different set of facts. There was not only the strange procedure of checking out of his hotel at four o'clock in the afternoon, when he intended catching an early morning train. There was also the information so innocently dropped by the loquacious Evelyn Rogers regarding Naomi's actions on the night of the murder.

According to Evelyn, her sister was an intensely nervous woman—one who stood in fear of being alone at night; and yet this sister had volunteered the suggestion that Evelyn should spend the night with Hazel Gresham when her husband was supposed to be out of the city.

Carroll, well versed in applied psychology, knew that in such a combination of facts there lay an important clue. He was well satisfied that Naomi Lawrence had been satisfied that she was not to be alone that night!

Arguing with himself from that premise, the conclusion was inevitable—she knew that her husband would return from Nashville at midnight. She did not wish any one, even Evelyn, to learn that he had done so. Therefore she got Evelyn out of the house!

The conclusion developed a further train of reasoning—one which Carroll did not at all relish, but which he faced with frank honesty. If he was right in his argument, then Naomi Lawrence had known of the murder before it was committed.

He shrank from the idea, but it would not down. He was not ready to admit its truth, but there was no denying its logic. There was something inexpressibly repug-

nant in the thought. He would much rather believe that Naomi hated her husband, and was miserable with him. Carroll preferred that to the idea that they were accomplices in the murder of a prominent young man.

Then, too, there were the strange visits of William Barker, former valet to Warren, to the home of the Lawrences. There was no doubt remaining in Carroll's mind that Barker knew a great deal about Warren's murder. That being the case, it was fairly well established that he was cognizant of the Lawrences' connection with the crime.

Carroll had started off with the idea that some one in addition to the woman in the taxicab had been instrumental in ending Warren's life. Here, following a casual line of investigation, he had uncovered the tracks of two men, both of whom he was convinced knew more about it than they had cared to tell.

Both men—Barker and Lawrence—had acted peculiarly under the grilling of the detective. The former had been surly and non-informative, only to leap eagerly upon the first verbal trend which tended to throw suspicion upon a person who, as Carroll knew, and as Carroll knew Barker knew, was innocent. Gerald Lawrence, on the other hand, had been downright antagonistic until he made the startling discovery that his supposed alibi was in reality no alibi at all — when his attitude changed from open hostility to something closely akin to suppliance.

Then, too, there was the danger of injuring an innocent man because of his inability to prove an alibi. If Lawrence's story was true, it was perfectly natural that even in a condition of intoxication he would maintain his instinct for concealment of a personal weakness. The chances were, then, that no one had seen him either in Nashville, after the four-o'clock train had left, or on the two-o'clock train homeward bound.

Matters could not right themselves in Carroll's mind. He knew one thing, however—Evelyn Rogers was a well-spring of vital information. The very fact that she talked inconsequentialities incessantly, and only occasionally let drop remarks of vital import, made her the more valuable. He knew that he had not seen the last of the seventeen-year-old girl; and he felt a consuming eagerness to be with her again, for now he had a definite line to pursue.

He slept soundly that night, and on the following morning he dropped in on Leverage. The chief of police had a little information, with all of which Carroll was already familiar. He told his friend that Lawrence had been in Nashville, and that he had checked out of the Hermitage Hotel in time to catch the four-o'clock train on the afternoon preceding the murder.

Carroll satisfied Leverage by accepting this as new information, made sure that nothing else of importance had developed, requested Leverage to ask the Nashville police to determine whether Lawrence had been seen in Nashville after half past four —if necessary to send one of his own men there—and left headquarters.

He made his way directly to a public telephone-booth. He telephoned the Lawrence home and asked for Evelyn Rogers. A maid answered, and informed him that Evelyn had left the house fifteen minutes previously.

"Any idea where she was going?" questioned Carroll.

The answer came promptly: it mentioned the city's leading department-store.

"She's gone there to get a beauty treatment," vouchsafed the maid.

Carroll was not a little chagrined. Evelyn Rogers had put him in more unpleasant positions in their brief acquaintanceship than he had experienced in years. There was his call upon her the previous night, with its rôle of dual entertainer to the young lady with a nineteen-year-old college freshman; and now a vigil outside a beauty parlor!

But he went grimly to work. He located the beauty parlor on the third floor of the giant store, and paced determinedly back and forth before its doors.

A half-hour passed — an hour — two hours. He concluded that Evelyn must be purchasing her beauty in job lots. When two hours and thirty-five minutes had elapsed she emerged—and Carroll groaned. With her were three other girls, as chattery, as immature, as Evelyn herself.

She swept down upon him in force, her tongue wagging at both ends.

"You naughty, *naughty* man!" she chided. "You absolutely deserted me last night! Why, I didn't even know that you had gone, until sis came in and said you had asked her to extend your respects. Good gracious, I almost *died!*"

"I'm sorry, really," returned Carroll

humbly; "but you seemed so much interested in that young man, and I had got into an absorbing conversation with your sister and brother-in-law. I'm not used to girls, you know."

"Oh, you kidder! I think you're simply *elegant!*"

She turned to her giggling friends and introduced them gushingly. Carroll was in misery—a martyr to his cause; but Evelyn would not let him get away. Through her sudden friendship with the great detective, Evelyn was building up a reputation that was destined to last for years, and she was not one to fail to make the most of her opportunities.

It was not until almost an hour later, when the other three girls had left for their homes—left only after they had hung around until the ultimate moment before lunch — that Carroll found himself alone with his little gold-mine of information. He bent his head hopefully.

"Were you planning to eat lunch downtown?" he inquired.

She nodded.

"Suppose we eat together?"

"Scrumptious!" There was no hint of hesitation in her manner. "I've been hoping ever since we met that you'd ask me."

They found a table mercifully secluded in the corner of the main dining-room of the city's leading hotel. For once Carroll felt gratitude for the notoriously slow service. He begged her to order, and she did —she ordered a meal which contained dynamitic possibilities for acute indigestion. Carroll smiled and let her have her way. He was amused at her valiant efforts to appear the blasé society woman.

"I really did enjoy our conversation last night, Miss Rogers."

"Oh, piffle! I don't fall for that."

"I did."

"Then why did you beat it so quick?"

"Well, you see, I suppose I was jealous of your elegantly dressed young friend."

"Him? He's just a kid—a mere *child!*"

"He seemed very much at home."

"Kids like him always do. They make me sick, always putting on as if they were grown up!"

She secured an olive and bit into it with a relish.

"Awfully good, these olives. I love olives, don't you? I used to be crazy about the ripe ones, but I read in a book once that sometimes they poison you, and when they do, there just simply isn't any antidote in the world that can save you. So I figured there wasn't any use taking chances."

Carroll let her run on until the meal was served. Then, when she was satisfying a normal youthful appetite, he drove straight to the subject which had led to this masculine martyrdom.

"The day before Mr. Warren died," he said mildly, "are you sure that your sister made the suggestion that you should spend the night with Miss Gresham?"

"Her? Sure she did!"

"Didn't it strike you as peculiar, knowing that she'd be in the house alone all that night?"

"I'll say it did. I asked her was she nutty, and she scolded me for being slangy; so I told her I should worry, if she wanted to suffer alone, and I went with Hazel. And it's an awfully good thing I did, because if I hadn't she would have been arrested and tried and convicted and hanged or something, and—"

"Oh, hardly as bad as that! You're sure your sister was alone in the house that night?"

"Quite sure. Who could have been there with her?"

"I'm not answering riddles. I'm asking them."

"I've got my fingers crossed. The answer is that there wasn't any one there. At first I thought she was going out, but she wasn't. When I asked her if she was, she got real peeved at me."

"Aa-a-h! You thought she was going out that night?"

"Uhuh," came the answer between bites of lobster salad.

"What made you think that?"

"Oh, just something! You know, I don't get credit for having eyes, but I sure have. I never did understand that business, anyway; but then sis always has been the queerest thing, ever since she married Gerald. Say"—she looked up eagerly—"ain't he the darnedest old crab you ever saw in your life?"

"Why, I—"

"Ain't he, honest?"

"He's not exactly jovial."

"He's a lemon—just a plain, juicy lemon. I think she was a nut to marry him!"

"But"—Carroll proceeded cautiously—"you made the remark just now that some-

thing was the queerest thing. What did you mean by that?"

"Oh, I guess I was crazy; but she got sore at me when I asked her—"

"Who?"

"Sis."

"What did you ask her?"

"Why"—she looked up innocently—"about that suit-case."

Carroll was keenly interested, but he struggled not to show it.

"What suit-case?" he asked casually. "When was that?"

"It was the day before Mr. Warren died—I always remember everything now by that date. I went into her room that morning to ask something about what I should take to Hazel's, and what do you think she was doing?"

"I'll bite," he answered with assumed jocularity. "What was she doing?"

"Packing a suit-case!"

"No?"

"Yes, sir. I asked her what she was doing it for, and that's when she got peeved. I told you she was a queer one."

"Indeed she must be! Packing a suit-case, when—"

"And that ain't all that was funny about that, either, Mr. Carroll."

"No? What else was peculiar?"

"That suit-case"—Evelyn lowered her voice to an impressive whisper—"was gone from the house the next day, but the day after that it showed up again; and when I asked sis if that wasn't funny, she told me to mind my own business!"

XV

EVELYN was piecing the threads of circumstance together, and the events surrounding the Warren murder were slowly clarifying in Carroll's brain.

He knew that now, of all times, he must keep her from thinking that he had any particular interest in her chatter. She was completely off guard, and he knew that for his own interests she must remain so. He assumed a bantering attitude, and resorted to what she would have termed "kidding."

"Aren't you the observant young woman, though? Not a single thing escapes your eagle eye, does it?"

She pouted.

"Oh, rag me if you want to; but I am *terribly* noticing. There ain't many things happen that I don't get wise to."

"Not even vanishing suit-cases, eh?"

"No, not even that. It was funny about that, though. At first I thought maybe sis was packing up to go and meet Gerald in Nashville; but then I figured out that it was bad enough to have to live with him here without chasing all over the country after him."

"You say the suit-case left the house after she packed it?"

"Sure pop!"

"Who took it?"

"I don't know. Sis was out a couple of times that day, so I guess she did."

Carroll shrugged.

"She was probably sending some of Mr. Lawrence's belongings to him in Nashville."

"Huh! There are some things even a great detective like you don't know. Don't you suppose I noticed that the clothes she was packing in that suit-case were *hers?*"

"Really?"

"You bet your life I noticed! You see"—she grew suddenly confidential—"there's a certain kind of perfume sis uses—awful expensive. Roland Warren used to bring it to her. Well, I've been using it, too, and sis never got wise. I only used it when she did, and when she smelled it, she didn't know that she was smelling what I had on. Well, it isn't likely she was sending that to Gerald, is it?"

"Hardly. But are you quite sure she packed it?"

"I'll say I am. I saw her do it. And then, two days later, I saw the bottle on her dressing-table again; so I just naturally looked to see if the suit-case was back, and it surely was."

"But perhaps it never left the house?"

"Guess again, Mr. Carroll! I know, because just before I went to Hazel's I hunted all over for it, to get some of that extract for myself, and it wasn't there. Believe me, that scent is some perfume, too!"

"You say Mr. Warren gave it to her?"

"He sure did. That man wasn't any piker, believe me. It costs twelve dollars an *ounce!*"

"No?"

"Yes—goodness knows how much a pound would cost! I used it all the time. I knew when he gave it to sis he meant it for me—because, like I told you, he was simply crazy about me. Told me so dozens of times. Said he came to see me. It used to bore him terribly when he had to sit in the room and talk to sis and Gerald."

"I fancy it did." Carroll summoned a

waiter. "How about a little baked Alaska for dessert?"

"Baked Alaska—oh, boy! You sure spoke a mouthful that time. I'm simply *insane* over it!"

She evidently had not exaggerated. She absorbed enough of the dessert to have satisfied two growing lads. It did Carroll good to witness her frank enjoyment of his luncheon.

Evelyn glanced at her wrist-watch and rose hastily.

"Goodness me, I've simply *got* to be going!"

"Where?"

She made a wry face.

"Hazel Gresham's. Honestly, women get queer when they grow up—when they get older than twenty. Hazel has been acting so peculiarly lately!"

"That's natural, isn't it, Miss Rogers? Her fiancé killed—"

"Oh, shucks! I don't mean that. That wouldn't be queer; but there's something else bothering her. When I try to get her to let me know what it is, she gets right snippy and tells me to mind my own business. And I'll say to you right now, Mr. Carroll, if there's one person in the world who always minds her own business, and doesn't pay the slightest attention in the world to other people's affairs, that person is me. I started that a long time ago, when I read something some one wrote in a book about how much happier folks would be if they never bothered with other folks' business. It struck me as awfully logical, and that's what I've always done. Don't you think I'm sensible?"

"I certainly do—very sensible. I'm sorry Miss Gresham isn't feeling well."

"Oh, she feels well enough. She's just acting nutty. And as for when your name is mentioned—o-o-oh!"

"*My* name?" Carroll was genuinely surprised.

"Yes, siree! I started telling her all about what good friends you and I have got to be, and—would you believe it?—she jumped all over me, just like sis did when I told her. She said I shouldn't associate with professional detectives—it was immoral, and all that sort of thing."

"Indeed?"

"You bet she did. It was scandalous! Of course I told her what a ducky you are, but she begged me not to go with you any more. I told her she was crazy, because I really don't think there's anything so very terrible about you—do you?"

"At least," smiled Carroll, "I won't eat you. But what you tell me about Miss Gresham is interesting. Why in the world should she be prejudiced against the man who is trying to locate the slayer of her fiancé?"

"Ask me something easy. I reckon it's just like I said before—when a woman gets to be twenty years old, she gets mentally unbalanced or something. Honestly, I haven't met a woman over nineteen years of age in the *longest* time who didn't have a crazy streak in her. Have you?"

"Oh, I'd hardly say that much."

They had crossed the hotel lobby, swung through the doors, and were standing on the sidewalk, unconsciously braced against the biting wind which shrieked around the corner and cut to the bone, giving the lie to the bright sunshine and its promise of warmth.

"*Brrrr!*" shivered Evelyn.

Carroll rose eagerly to the hint.

"I'd be delighted to ride you to Miss Gresham's in my car," he suggested.

"*Would* you? That would be simply splendiferous! I'd like Hazel to meet you, too. Then she'd know that you're just a regular human being, in spite of what every one says."

During the drive to the Gresham home, which stood on the side of the mountain at the extreme southern end of the city, Evelyn did about one hundred and one per cent of the talking. She blithely discussed everything from the economic effect of the recent election to the campaign against one-piece bathing-suits for women.

She had, and expressed, well-defined if immature opinions on every subject. She informed Carroll that she was delighted with suffrage, but opposed to prohibition; that the League of Nations would be all right if only it was not so far away; that she was sincerely of the belief that straight lines would pass out within the year, and the girl with a curvy figure have a chance again in the world; that fur coats were all the rage, and he ought to see her sister's—it was the *grandest* in the city; that—

In fact, she orated at length on any subject which occurred to her tireless mind, securing his dumb agreement with her views, and liking him more and more with each passing minute because he treated her seriously, like a full-grown woman.

They pulled up at the curb of the Gresham home. As they did so, Garry Gresham swung out of the gate. He paused, and his eyes widened in astonishment at sight of Carroll. Then he stepped quickly to the curb as Carroll and the girl alighted.

"Hello, Garry!" greeted Evelyn boldly.

It was the first time she had ever called him by his first name; but Gresham did not notice.

"Hello, Evelyn," he replied curtly, and addressed himself to Carroll—his eyes level, his manner direct. "What do you want here, Carroll?" he inquired.

There was an undertone of earnestness in the young man's words which the detective did not fail to note. He simulated innocence.

"I? Nothing."

Garry Gresham frowned.

"You had no particular reason for coming here?"

"None whatever. Why?"

"It seemed significant, after your original suspicion of my sister."

Carroll laughed good-naturedly.

"Rid your mind of that, my friend. I merely happened to be down-town with Miss Rogers, and drove her up here in my car. As a matter of fact, if you have no objection, I should very much like to meet your sister."

"Why?"

"Because she was Roland Warren's fiancée. Because she can tell me some things about Warren which no one else can tell me. Because the Warren case is almost as far from solution as it was one minute after the killing occurred."

Gresham thought intensively for a moment before he spoke.

"You can give me your word of honor, Carroll, that you are convinced that my sister is not in any way connected with the crime?"

"I can, Gresham. So far as I now know, your sister has no connection whatever with the case; but she must be in possession of certain personal details regarding Warren which I should like to find out."

Gresham started back toward the house.

"You may talk to her," he decided briefly, "if she is willing; but I prefer to be present during the interview."

Carroll bowed.

"As you will, Gresham."

They walked to the house, and Garry led the way to the front hall. Evelyn, considerably piqued at being ignored, took advantage of his disappearance in search of his sister to open up a broadside of inconsequential chatter before which her previous efforts paled into insignificance. It was in the midst of her verbal barrage that Gresham appeared at the far end of the hall with his sister.

Carroll was pleasantly surprised. Evelyn's protestations of intimacy with Hazel Gresham had implanted in his mind the impression that she was another specimen of the flapper type. He was glad to find that she was something quite different.

She was not a beautiful girl. Rather she belonged in that very desirable category which is labeled "sweet." There was an attractive wistfulness about her—an undeniable charm, a wholesomeness. She was the sort of a woman, Carroll instantly reflected, whom a sensible man marries.

There was no hint of affection about her. Her eyes were a trifle red and swollen, and she seemed in the grip of something more than mere excitement; but in her dress there was no ostentation—it was somber, but not black. She came straight to Carroll, her eyes meeting his squarely, and they mutually acknowledged Evelyn's gushing, but unheard, introduction:

"Miss Gresham—Mr. Carroll."

They seated themselves about a small table which stood in the center of the reception-hall, and even Evelyn sensed the undercurrent of tenseness in the air. Her tongue became reluctantly still, although she did break in once with a triumphant "Ain't he like I told you he was?" to Hazel.

It was Garry who introduced the subject.

"Mr. Carroll wants to ask you something about Roland," he said softly.

Carroll, intercepting the look which passed between brother and sister, felt a sense of warmth, a pleasant glow. At the same time, his feeling was tinged with guilt, as if he had blundered in on something sacred.

The girl's eyes did not waver as her voice came softly in reply.

"What is it you wish to know, Mr. Carroll?"

The detective was momentarily at a loss. He conscripted his entire store of tact.

"I don't care to cause you any embarrassment, Miss Gresham—"

"This is no time for equivocation, Mr. Carroll. Ask me whatever you wish."

"Thank you," he answered gratefully. "You have heard, of course, that there is a woman connected with Mr. Warren's death—the woman in the taxicab."

Her face grew pallid, but she nodded.

"Yes, of course."

He watched her closely.

"Miss Gresham, have you the slightest idea—have you even a suspicion—of that woman's identity?"

"No!" she answered, and he knew that she had spoken the truth.

"You have thought of it—of her—a good deal?"

"Naturally."

"Mind you, I'm not asking if you *know*. I'm merely asking if you have a suspicion."

"I have not—not the faintest."

"You were quite satisfied—pardon the intensely personal trend of my questions, Miss Gresham—that during his engagement to you Mr. Warren was—well, that he was carrying on no affair with another woman?"

"I say, Carroll!"

It was Garry Gresham who interrupted, and his voice was harsh; but his sister halted him with a little affectionate gesture.

"Mr. Carroll is right, Garry. He must know these things." She turned again to Carroll. "No, Mr. Carroll, I knew of no such affair, nor did I suspect one. When I became engaged to Mr. Warren I placed my trust in him as a gentleman. I still believe in him."

"Yet we know that there was a woman in that cab!"

"No-o. We know that the taxi-driver *says* there was."

"That's true, but—"

Hazel Gresham leaned forward, her manner that of a suppliant.

"Mr. Carroll, why don't you abandon this horrible investigation? Why aren't you content to let matters rest where they are?"

"I couldn't do that, Miss Gresham."

"Why not?"

"Mr. Warren's murderer is still at large, and as a matter of duty—"

"Duty to whom? I am content to let the matter rest where it is. All your investigating isn't going to restore Roland to life. You can only cause more misery, more suffering, more heart-break!"

"It is a duty to the State, Miss Gresham. Frankly, I cannot understand your attitude."

"She has had enough," broke in Garry Gresham. "She's been through hell since—that night!"

"I'm afraid, though—"

"Mr. Carroll, you *can* call it off, if you will." Hazel Gresham rose and paced the room. "The case is in your hands. You can gain nothing by finding the person who committed the—the—deed. Let's drop it. Do me that favor, won't you? Let's consider the whole thing at an end!"

David Carroll was puzzled, but he was honest.

"I'm afraid I cannot, Miss Gresham. I must at least try to solve it."

She paused before him, and her figure tensed.

"Then let me say, Mr. Carroll, that I hope you fail!"

XVI

FROM the Gresham home David Carroll went straight to police headquarters. Developments had been tumbling over one another so fast that he found himself unable to sort them properly. He wanted to talk the thing over with some one, to place each new lead in the investigation under the microscope in an attempt to discern its true value in relation to the killing of Roland Warren.

Eric Leverage was the one man to whom he could talk freely. Locked in the chief's office, Carroll told all that he knew about the case, detailing conversations, explaining the situation as he understood it, reserving his suspicions, and watching keenly for the reaction on the stolid mind of the plodding, practical official.

Carroll placed an exceedingly high valuation on Leverage's opinion, even though the minds of the two men were as far apart as the poles. Leverage was a magnificent man for the office he held—competent, methodical, intensely orthodox, but typical of the modern police in contradistinction to the modern detective.

Carroll knew that modern police methods have received a great deal more than their share of unjust criticism. He knew that the entire theory of national policing is based on an exhaustive system of records and statistics. It operates by brute force and all-pervading power rather than by any attempt at subtlety or keen deduction. The former is safer as a method; but a combination of the two—keen analysis, logical deduction, and plodding investigation—can

perform wonders, which explains why Carroll and Leverage worked hand-in-hand with implicit confidence in each other.

Leverage listened with rapt attention to his friend's report. Occasionally the corners of his large, humorous mouth twitched as Carroll touched on one or two of the lighter phases of his investigation. Once Leverage twitted him about becoming "one of these here butterfly investigators"; but Carroll knew that no word of his escaped the retentive brain of the chief of the city's police force, and that each was being carefully catalogued, probably with a truer estimation of its proper importance than Carroll had yet been able to formulate.

"And so," finished Carroll, "there you are. The thing is in as pretty a mess as I care to encounter. Frankly, I don't know which way to turn next—which is why I wanted to talk things over. Perhaps, between us, we can arrive at some solution of the affair and determine upon some course of action."

"Yes," responded Leverage slowly, "perhaps we can. Only trouble is, there's so many different ways of spilling the beans that we're taking a chance no matter what we do. Answer me this, David—if you had to point out one person right now as the guilty one, which would you choose?"

Carroll shook his head.

"You know I don't like to answer questions of that sort."

"But you can tell me—"

"No-o! It might start your mind working along lines parallel to mine, and I prefer to have you buck me. In perfect honesty, I'll tell you that I'm all at sea. I couldn't conscientiously make an arrest now."

"Well, I'm willing to air my opinions," volunteered the chief. "And I'm telling you that if it was up to me to make an arrest to-day, I'd nab Mr. Gerald Lawrence, and I'd haul in William Barker for good measure."

"M-m!" Carroll nodded approvingly. "Sounds reasonable. But how about the woman?"

"That's what's got me puzzled. I've worked on that end of it, and I've had several of my best men circulating around trying to gather dope from the gossip shops; but there doesn't seem to be a clue from this end. Anyway—I don't believe Warren was killed by the woman in the taxi."

Carroll was genuinely impressed.

"You don't?"

"No. Don't believe any woman—I don't care who — would have killed him under those circumstances."

"You mean you believe the woman in the taxi had nothing to do with it?"

"I don't mean anything of the kind. I know darned well she had something to do with it, but I don't believe she did the actual killing. That's why I'd arrest this bird Lawrence, and also William Barker. They either killed the man or know all about it."

"But," suggested Carroll slowly, "suppose we admit that your theory is correct—and I've thought of it myself; but how and where was that body put into the taxicab?"

Leverage shrugged.

"That's where you come in, Carroll. I ain't the sort of thinker who can puzzle out anything like that. Of course I'd say the only place the shift could have been made was when the taxi stopped at the R. L. and T. railroad crossing; but every time I think that, it strikes me I must be wrong; because any birds working a case like that couldn't have counted on such a break of luck."

"It might have been," suggested Carroll, "that two men entered the cab at that crossing—Warren and another, both alive, and the killing might have occurred between then and the time the cab reached No. 981 East End Avenue."

"Might have—yes; but something tells me it didn't. It's asking too much."

"Then what *do* you think happened?"

"I don't think. There just simply isn't anything you can think about an affair like that. You either know everything or you don't know a thing."

"I think you're about right, Leverage. And now let's run over the list we have in front of us. Spike Walters, the taxi-driver, comes first. What about him?"

Leverage rubbed his chin.

"Funny about Spike, Carroll—I think the kid's story is true."

"So do I."

"But unless there's some other answer to this affair, it's damned hard to believe that the body could have been dumped into that cab, or that the killing could have occurred there, without Spike knowing about it. Ain't that a fact?"

"It is."

"And if he knows anything he hasn't told, the odds are on him to know a whale of a sight more. And if he knows a whole

heap, then the chances are he knows enough to justify us in keeping him in jail."

"You're right, Leverage. If Spike is innocent, he's not undergoing any enormous hardship; but if his story is untrue in any particular, then it is probably entirely false. And since we cannot understand how that body got into the cab, or where the murderer went, we've got to hold on to Spike. Meanwhile, we both believe him."

"You said it, David. Now, next on the list we have Barker. What about him?"

"I don't like Barker particularly," said Carroll frankly. "He hasn't what you would call an engaging personality. Not only that, but we are agreed that he knows a great deal about the case which he hasn't told, and doesn't intend to tell, unless we force him to it. Let us go back to him later. He's too important a link in the chain to pass over casually when we're trying to hit on a definite course of action. Of course, we won't forget that his visits to the Lawrence home have a certain degree of significance."

Leverage chuckled grimly.

"You're coming around to my way of thinking, David Carroll! Remember, I wanted to stick that bird behind the bars the first day we talked to him, when we first knew he was lying to us."

"Yes, but we wouldn't have gained anything—then. Perhaps now the time is ripe to try some of that third-degree stuff. But let's take up the others—my little friend, Miss Evelyn Rogers, for instance."

Leverage chuckled.

"Go to it, David! You know more about that kid than I ever will, or want to. Ain't suspecting her of being the woman in the taxi, are you?"

"Good Lord, no! She hasn't that much on her mind; but if we manage to solve this case, we can thank her. That little tongue of hers wags at both ends, and out of the welter of words that drip from her lips I've managed to extract more information than from every other source we've tapped. I've been awfully lucky there!"

"Don't talk like a simp, David! 'Tain't luck—it's your way of working; but because there isn't anything flashy about it, you call it luck. Why, you poor fish, there isn't any other man in the country who'd have had the sense to do what you did—to know that it would be a good move."

"Some day, Eric," grinned Carroll, "I'm going to throw you down—I'm going to flunk on a case. Then you'll say to my face what you must often have thought—that I'm a lucky, old-maidish detective."

"G'wan wid ye! Fishing for compliments—that's what you are."

Carroll grew serious again.

"I think we're safe in eliminating Evelyn Rogers from our calculations, except as a gold-mine of information. Which takes us to her friend, Hazel Gresham."

"And Garry Gresham. You say he didn't want you to discuss the case with his sister?"

"They both acted mighty peculiarly," agreed Carroll. "One of them, I'm sure, knows something about that case—had some inside dope on it; and the one who knew has surely told the other one. The affection between them is something pretty to look at, Leverage."

"You think one of them is in on the know?"

"Yes, I think so; and I think their information touches some one who is pretty close to both of them. That's obviously why they pleaded so hard with me to call off the investigation."

"M-m-m! They're pretty good friends to the Lawrences, aren't they?"

"Yes—with Naomi Lawrence, anyway. I don't believe Gerald Lawrence is especially friendly with any one; but the Greshams and Mrs. Lawrence are pretty intimate."

"And you believe that the alibi Miss Rogers established for Hazel Gresham is good?"

Carroll hesitated a moment before replying. When he did speak it was with obvious reluctance.

"I hate to say this, Leverage, because I like Evelyn Rogers, and I took an instant liking to both Hazel Gresham and her brother; but there seems to be something wrong about it. I do think that Evelyn Rogers believed she was telling the truth, but I'm not so sure that her dope was accurate. Just where the inaccuracy comes I haven't the least idea; but I'm not letting my likes and dislikes stand in the way of a sane outlook on the case. I am convinced that both the young Greshams know something more than they have told. In fact, there isn't a doubt of it. They showed it clearly when they begged me to call off the investigation. We know, further, that they are intimate with Naomi Lawrence, and we know that either Naomi or her husband, or both, are mixed up in this case. Events

dovetail too perfectly for us to ignore the fact that however right Evelyn Rogers may believe she is, she may be wrong."

"And I'm not forgetting, either," said Leverage grimly, "that Hazel Gresham was engaged to marry Warren."

"No, nor am I. It's a puzzling combination of circumstances, Leverage—a perfectly knit thing, if one only knew where or how to commence the unraveling. But we don't; and so now we come to Gerald Lawrence and his wife."

Leverage did not take his cue immediately. He sat drumming a heavy tattoo on the table-top, his forehead corrugated in a frown of intensive thought. When he finally spoke to Carroll, it was in a manner well-nigh abstract.

"Gerald Lawrence probably lied when he said he didn't leave Nashville until the two-o'clock train."

"He may have. One thing which impressed me about Lawrence was this, Leverage—when the man started bucking me, he thought he had a perfect alibi. He was supremely confident that I was going to be completely nonplused. It was only after I had questioned him closely that he realized his alibi was no alibi at all. He realized he couldn't prove where he was at the time the murder was committed—that for all the evidence he could adduce he might have been right here in this city."

"Yes?"

"The significant fact is this," explained Carroll. "When he made the discovery that his alibi was no good, *he* was the most surprised person in the room!"

"And you're thinking," suggested the chief, "that if he had actually had a hand in the murder of Warren he would have had an alibi that would have been an alibi?"

"Just about that. Get me straight, chief. I would rather believe Lawrence guilty than any other person—except perhaps Barker—with whom I have come in contact since this investigation began. He has one of the most unpleasant personalities I have ever had to deal with. He is a congenital grouch; but he told his Nashville story so frankly, and then became so panicky with surprise when my questioning showed him that his alibi was rotten, that we must not fasten definitely upon him."

"Except to be pretty darned sure that he knows more about it than he has told."

"Yes—perhaps."

"Perhaps? Ain't you sure he does?"

"I'm not sure of anything. I haven't one single item of information save that regarding the one person whom I would prefer to see left clear."

"And that is?"

"Naomi Lawrence."

Leverage nodded agreement.

"Things do look pretty tough for her."

"More so than you think, Eric." Carroll designated on his fingers. "Count the facts against her as we know them, irrespective of their weight or significance. First, she is a beautiful woman, twelve years younger than her husband, and apparently unhappy in her domestic life. Second, she was very friendly with Roland Warren. Of course, Miss Rogers's fatuous belief that Warren was crazy about her is pure rot. He called at that house to see either Gerald or Naomi Lawrence. We must admit that the chances are the woman was the person in whom he was interested. Third, in substantiation of that belief, we know that he frequently gave her presents. It doesn't matter how valuable the presents were—he gave them. That proves a certain amount of interest."

Carroll paused for a brief explanation.

"Mind you, Leverage, I'm not trying to make out a case against Naomi Lawrence; I'm only being honest. To continue—fourth, we know that in spite of the fact that she is afraid to remain in a house alone at night, she suggested that her sister should sleep at the home of Hazel Gresham on the night Warren was killed. Her husband was supposed, according to his story, to be in Nashville. It is absurd to presume that when she let Evelyn go out for the night she expected to remain alone until morning. Therefore, for the sake of argument, we will assume that she knew her husband would be back that night. If that is the case, it looks as if there was something sinister about it. Fifth, we are fairly positive that she packed a suit-case the morning before the murder, that it left the house that morning, and that two days later it mysteriously reappeared—"

"Yes," interrupted Leverage, "and we know that Warren was planning to make a trip with some one else!"

"Exactly!"

"Which makes it pretty clear," finished Leverage positively, "that Mrs. Lawrence was the woman in the taxicab!"

(*To be concluded in the October number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

The Magic Pencil

HOW A SPELL OF ORIENTAL MAGIC WAS TESTED IN PRACTICAL NEW YORK

By Ray Cummings

HE squatted on the stone pavement of the street—a ragged, squalid figure. The naked limbs that protruded from his torn and dirty robe were thin as sticks. His cheeks were sunken; his somber eyes burned deep-set in their sockets.

Before him the broad waters of the Ganges lay dazzlingly bright under the slanting rays of the late afternoon sun; behind him spread the domed city of Benares, brilliant-hued, fantastic, mysterious.

The passing crowd of natives ignored him. Occasionally some one would stop to look at his little trained snake, and the few trinkets laid out before him on the ground. A party of American tourists wandered idly past. A young girl dressed all in white, cool-looking, fresh, and beautiful, paused curiously; the elderly gentleman with her stopped also.

The Hindu fakir was ingratiatingly demonstrative, but the lure of his trinkets proved inadequate. Finally he drew from under his robe an object evidently intended to be specially impressive. It was a little oblong of carved silver as long as his hand—a dragon with two small rubies for its eyes. He pressed a spring, and a thin, narrow blade of steel slid forth.

"A dagger," he said, "with which one could kill if one desired."

The girl shuddered a little. The fakir closed the blade and turned a little knob at the dragon's throat; from its mouth projected a slender point of lead.

"For you, lady, this would perhaps be better."

The elderly gentleman touched her arm.

"Let us get along, Ruth. The others are far ahead."

The Hindu raised his shriveled hands.

"One moment, lady. Such pencils as these are very rare. Let me tell you of its power. Never has a word come from that point of lead. A magic spell lies over it. Wrought by holy hands, blessed by the highest of our faith, from the monastery of Lahnda it comes. Keep it with you always, lady, but write with it never—until some day when you are impelled to read its magic words. Then, lady, if the time be ripe, the words it writes will bring into your life a great love—all that your heart could desire."

The girl laughed, but she did not turn away. The Hindu spoke again, more earnestly, pleadingly. At the girl's instigation the gentleman interrupted him, and the bargaining began.

A moment later the girl dropped the little silver dragon-pencil into her purse. The gentleman threw some coins upon the ground in payment; and they moved away.

II

THEY called James Bryce the Maupassant of America. Like Maupassant, he wrote of life frankly, brutally; but unlike his French prototype he colored it always with a touch of romance. A subtle, delicate grace and charm made his writing characteristically his own. To his most intimate friends Bryce confessed a weakness for melodrama. He saw life, perhaps, from the melodramatic view-point. Certainly it was reflected in his stories.

In his lighter moments James Bryce wrote charmingly of love; yet those who knew him best would have said he had never himself felt the emotions of which he wrote so convincingly. At thirty-two he was still a bachelor—a handsome, cultured, debonair man of the world.

It was near midnight one winter evening. Bryce was sitting alone in his small but luxurious study. The room was on the

ground floor of the palatial building in which his apartment was located; its windows looked directly over the sidewalk, level with the heads of passers-by. A private entrance, with a short flight of steps, led down to the pavement, giving Bryce a freedom of movement that fitted his irregular hours.

In one wall of the room was a fireplace with a blazing log fire. Bryce sat before it, reclining at his ease, and thinking over the play from which he had just come.

A steady stream of taxis went scurrying by in the street outside. One of them stopped in front of the house and honked ostentatiously. Bryce went to the window; then, as he recognized the slender, fur-coated young man leaving the taxi, he opened the door and stood waiting upon the threshold. He smiled to himself as he saw a girl's hand and arm resting upon the window-ledge of the waiting car.

Divested of his overcoat, the visitor proved to be a young man of perhaps nineteen or twenty. He was in evening clothes —a good-looking, sturdy sort of chap, with an amusing little swagger of manner. He settled himself before the fire, spreading out his hands to the warmth of its blaze.

"Just stopped in for a minute," he announced apologetically.

Bryce did not answer at once, and his visitor continued:

"Went to the opera to-night — rotten bore! Thought I'd stop in and see you a minute. Been out?"

Bryce named one of Broadway's latest thrillers, which promised to be the sensation of the season.

"That's more like it," said the young man enthusiastically. "That's a way to spend an evening; but this Caruso business —ugh!"

"Evidently you don't like highbrow entertainment, Bertie," said Bryce, smiling.

"Not music," retorted Bertie. "Melodrama's my long suit."

Bryce laughed.

"Melodrama," Bertie repeated stoutly. "I'm going to be a writer, too, some day— you see if I don't. I'm going to write melodrama, and—and romance."

Bryce thought of the girl in the waiting taxi.

"You're young, Bertie," he said lightly. "Romance—of course!"

He waited through a moment of silence, wondering just what had brought his youthful visitor at so unconventional an hour.

Bertie sat idly fingering a curiously wrought little metal object he had produced from his pocket.

"Take a look at this," he said abruptly.

The object he held was made of silver— a dragon with two tiny rubies for its eyes.

"Odd little thing," he said.

He touched a spring, and a long, narrow blade of steel, keen-edged and sharp-pointed, sprang forth. Bryce stood beside him looking over his shoulder.

"It's a pencil, too," explained Bertie.

He turned a little knob at the dragon's throat, and from its mouth projected a tiny point of lead.

Bryce sat down.

"It *is* curious. Where did you get it?"

For a moment Bertie did not answer, but sat gazing down abstractedly at the little point of lead, tracing with it meaningless marks on the whiteness of his cuff.

"I was just wondering," he said finally, "what are the words that lead will write."

Bryce stared at him silently.

"That's a funny idea, isn't it?" Bertie added. "That's—well, to tell the truth, that's what I stopped in to see you about."

Bryce took the pencil in his hand.

"What are you getting at, Bertie?"

"Just think of all the unwritten words in that pencil-point," the youth went on softly. He seemed a little awed by what he was saying. "For all you know, there's a big story in there, stored up in that lead, waiting for you to let it out."

"Quaint enough idea," said Bryce. "It might make a story."

Bertie smiled deprecatingly.

"I just happened to think of it," he said. "I'm awfully glad if it's any help to you." He paused again, apparently embarrassed; then, hitching his chair forward, he added confidentially: "To tell the truth, Mr. Bryce, there's more to it than that. It's a magic pencil. It's never been written with yet."

"A magic pencil?"

Bertie nodded.

"Yes. Friend of mine—girl, you know —bought the thing in India. It has a spell over it."

"Oh!" said Bryce.

"And—and we wondered," Bertie went on quickly. "That is—she thought—we were wondering what it would write if *you* wrote with it."

Bryce fingered the pencil musingly.

"We—we want you to write a story with it—to-night. Will you?"

"The unwritten words in a lead pencil!" repeated Bryce thoughtfully. "Yes—that *is* a quaint idea."

"Write on that," urged his visitor. "You know, just to try out the pencil. Will you?"

He rose to his feet.

"It might make a story," said Bryce. "Must I write it to-night?"

"Yes," said Bertie. "Er—that is—we—I'd like you to."

Bryce stood up beside him.

"I'm pretty tired," he smiled; "but I'll try—if I must." He turned the pencil over in his hand and chuckled. "A magic pencil!"

Bertie put on his coat and adjusted his hat at a rakish angle.

"That's what he said—the Hindu she bought it from. I hope you get a good story. Will there be a girl in it?"

"There probably will," Bryce answered. "There's a girl in almost everything."

"Why don't you write up a girl for yourself?" asked Bertie, growing suddenly bold. "The sort of girl *you* would like to fall in love with—try *that* on the pencil!"

Bryce smiled quietly.

"A girl for me? I suppose there must be one somewhere."

"Maybe the pencil will tell you." Bertie hesitated; then, flushing a little at his own temerity, he went on swiftly; "I know a girl you'd fall for—Ruth Dorrance, my cousin. She's a peach of a girl, awfully pretty, and—and romantic as the dickens. She thinks she's a bit too old for me—I don't know. That's her pencil, by the way."

Bryce held out his hand.

"Drop in to-morrow evening, Bertie, and I'll read you what I've written."

"Sure!" said Bertie enthusiastically. "I'll bring Miss Dorrance, too. May I?"

Bryce nodded abstractedly.

Bertie had opened the door, and for an instant stood fumbling with the latch.

"Well, I'll get along now and let you write. Do it right away, won't you?"

He closed the door and was gone.

III

SITTING alone by the fire, with his paper on his lap, and the awkward, unwieldy pencil in his hand, James Bryce prepared to write. His mind held a confusion of nebulous thoughts and ideas, and for a long time he stared abstractedly into the fire. A magic pencil! Weird idea—nothing to it, of course.

He looked at the pencil between his fingers; and somehow, in spite of himself, he felt a little awed. What words were destined to come from that point of lead? Words as yet unwritten — words of love, hate, hope, or despair? *His* brain would produce them, of course. That was only common sense. And yet—he wondered.

He felt in very poor mood to write. He was tired. His brain was tired, too. What would he write?

The noise of the automobiles hurrying past outside, the clank of their tire-chains, and their deep-throated, raucous cries, seemed very loud and obtrusive. They annoyed him; he found himself listening to them intently. He frowned and gripped the pencil firmer, trying to formulate in his mind something that would be worth writing. Then, after a time, the noises outside seemed slowly to die away, until they became all faint and blurred and confused.

He came to himself with the sudden sense that he had been asleep, and that some unusual noise had awakened him. He felt cold and a little stiff. Glancing at the clock on the mantel, he saw that it was only half past twelve; if he had been asleep, it could only have been for a short time.

The pencil had dropped from his fingers, and was lying on the floor beside him. He stooped to pick it up, and his glance fell on the pile of manuscript sheets lying on the little lap-board across his knees. They were covered with penciled script!

Full memory came to him, and his heart leaped. The magic pencil! And it *had* written! He picked up one or two of the pages. The writing was a hasty, somewhat ill-formed scrawl, evidently not his own—at least, not as he usually wrote. With trembling fingers he gathered up the little pile of manuscript, and, assuring himself earnestly that the thing was all nonsense, he read:

A sharp click on the window-pane made the famous author look up suddenly. For an instant he waited—tense, expectant. The click was repeated—a double rap this time. He rose, noiselessly crossed the room, and jerked up the shade suddenly. A woman's face peered up at him through the glass. He stared down into her eyes—deep, unfathomable, purple pools, the windows of a soul in anguish. And as he stared, a slender,

white hand came up, and he saw its fingers gripping the coin which she had clicked against the pane.

He raised the sash, stooping down until his face was nearly level with hers.

"What do you want?" he asked harshly.

"I want to see you—to talk with you," said the girl.

He could see that she was quite young, and beautiful, with delicately chiseled, almost perfect features. He could see, too, that there was no rouge on her cheeks or lips, and that her quiet yet costly clothes were those of a woman of refinement and culture.

"Mr. Bryce, I—oh, you see I know you!" She gave a queer little laugh. "Won't you let me come in?"

He closed the window abruptly. He opened the door, and in an instant she was in the room, shaking the snow from her furs and blinking confusedly in the sudden glare of light from the electrolier overhead.

He went to the wall and turned off the lights. Only the firelight remained—a dancing yellow glow that threw grotesque, swaying shadows against the walls of the room and left its corners black and impenetrable.

The girl stood looking about her uncertainly.

"Won't you sit down?" he said. "Let me take your wraps."

She took the chair he offered. She was dressed in a low-cut evening gown; and against the satin skin of her neck hung a huge diamond pendant. It was the only piece of jewelry she wore.

"I didn't dare ring your bell," she said after a moment. "Your servants—no one must know that I am here; so when I saw you sitting there I clicked on your window with this."

He saw she still held the coin in her fingers.

"What do you want of me?" he asked. "Why do you come to me in this way?"

He thought he had never before seen so lovely a woman. Her eyes widened with surprise. She smiled.

"I came because you made me," she answered. "You *did* make me, did you not?"

He waited, silent, trying to fathom the meaning of her words.

"I came to you," she repeated quietly, "because you called me. You have thought of me often, haven't you? And now you see me—the nameless girl of your thoughts."

Partial understanding came to him. His heart beat faster. She was very beautiful, sitting there with her head resting against the soft crimson pillow he had placed behind it.

"I don't think I understand," he said slowly.

Again she smiled—a wistful smile this time, he thought.

"You write of life," she said, "but you do not understand it. That is because you have not lived—as yet."

"Why do you say I have not lived?" he asked gently.

He wondered if he *had* ever really lived; he wondered if he were not meeting life for the first time now.

"One has not lived until one has loved," she said quietly.

He leaned forward in his chair toward her. The firelight threw a warm, rich glow over her cheeks and deepened the shadows in her hair—wonderful wavy hair, black as a raven's wing, with a single white lock running straight back from her forehead. He gazed curiously at the odd silver streak—a line of purest white amid the black. Then his eyes fell to hers.

"How do you know I have never loved?" he asked.

"I know—for if you had loved it would be in what you write."

"What you say is not true—now," he said quietly.

A log in the fire fell forward. He rose and replaced it. The little clock on the mantel struck. The girl rose to her feet hastily.

"I think you must let me go now," she said.

Let her go! This girl of mystery who had come into his life hardly ten minutes before! He stared again at her delicate oval face, with the fluffy black hair above, and that single lock of white. Let her go! This girl who had brought him—love!

"I shall see you again?" he asked softly. Then with a sudden rush of emotion he demanded: "Who are you? What are you?"

He spoke vehemently, but his soul was flooded with tenderness. Her figure drooped; she shook her head.

"I cannot tell you that," she said. "That is something you—you must find out for yourself."

He put his hands on her slender shoulders; the grip of his fingers made her wince.

"Shall I never see you again?" He almost whispered the pleading words.

"Perhaps you will find me—some day. I—I want you to!"

She swayed toward him, and in an instant she was in his arms.

"I must go now," she said, when she had struggled free. "You must not keep me now."

He flung the door wide; resolute purpose set his jaw firm.

"I understand," he said abruptly. "Good-by. Go your way. I shall find you—some day—if I can."

"Good night," she answered softly. "It is not good-by."

He closed the door and was alone—alone with the brief memory of the girl he loved; alone with the determination to find her again—to keep her for his own forever.

James Bryce laid down the last page of this strange little manuscript, and, with his heart beating so fast that it seemed almost to smother him, he wondered what it all meant. The magic pencil! And this was what it had written! Had he really been asleep, or half asleep, and had his fingers guided it to set down these curious words? Was this, in truth, his own story—*his* romance—foretold by a Hindu pencil? He could not believe it possible. And yet he had often read of Yogi magic—the wonderful occultism of India.

He glanced through the pages again. Was this the girl he was some day to love? He read over portions of the scrawled sentences. "Wonderful wavy hair, black as

a raven's wing, with a single white lock running straight back from her forehead." It was not such a sentence as he would normally have written, but it described vividly this girl whose image now stood clear before him. He knew no girl with hair like that; but should he meet her, he would recognize her at once. He smiled to himself at his seriousness about this strange new idea; and went to bed, still trying to puzzle it out.

IV

At nine o'clock the next evening he was no nearer a solution of the mystery than he had been the night before. His doorbell rang; and when he opened the door himself he found Bertie and a girl standing on the stoop.

"Come in, Bertie!" he said heartily.

"Right on time," said Bertie. "I brought Miss Dorrance with me. You know—my cousin who loaned us the magic Indian pencil. Ruth, this is the great James Bryce."

Bryce put out a hand toward the slender one the girl had extended, and then stopped, transfixed. She was a small, very pretty girl, in a big fur coat. Her head was covered only by a thin, filmy scarf; and now, as she stood underneath the center lights, he could see plainly the wavy, fluffy mass of black hair beneath the scarf. Running back from her forehead was a single lock of pure white!

Too much confused to speak, Bryce stood staring at the girl. Bertie, ignoring them, took off his coat and settled himself in the most comfortable chair by the fire.

"How did the pencil work? Did you get a good story? We're crazy to hear it!"

Bryce pulled himself together with an effort.

"I—I beg your pardon. I'm very glad—of course I'm very glad to meet you, I'm sure."

He realized he was talking inanely. He found himself wondering whether she had a diamond pendant on her neck. She had loosened her coat, and with a sudden shock he saw the diamond sparkling there against her throat. He forced himself to shake hands conventionally.

"Won't you sit down?" he said. "And let me take your wraps."

The very words the pencil had written! They slipped from him unconsciously; he did not realize the duplication until he had voiced them. For a moment Bryce stood wondering whether he was asleep or awake. Was this all some extraordinary dream, or was he really acting out now what the pencil had foretold?

"Say, what's the matter with you two?" cried Bertie.

Bryce came back to himself with the realization that the girl was standing before him in obvious embarrassment.

"I beg your pardon," he said again. He forced himself to smile as he helped her off with her coat. "I'm afraid I'm a little absent-minded to-night," he went on. "I'm not usually so rude. I—won't you sit down, Miss Dorrance?"

"Yes, sit down," said Bertie, eying them quizzically. "How did the pencil work?" he added, as they took their places with him before the fire. "What did it write? We could hardly wait to get here to-night to find out."

Bryce met the girl's frankly interested gaze. She *was* very pretty—a delicate, refined little face, and quiet, honest eyes. Curious how difficult it was for him to compose his thoughts as he looked at her!

"Bertie told me about your experiment with my Indian pencil, Mr. Bryce," she said. Her intonation was remarkably soft and musical. "We were tremendously interested, naturally."

"What *did* it write?" Bertie put in.

Bryce ignored him. He smiled at Miss Dorrance, hoping that the strange attraction this girl seemed to have for him was not depicted in his expression.

"Tell me about the pencil, Miss Dorrance," he said.

"I bought it several years ago, in Benares," she began slowly. "It was supposed to be a magic pencil, and—"

"And the Yogi you bought it from said it would bring a great love into your life," Bertie finished. "Why don't you tell it all, Ruth?"

Miss Dorrance blushed.

"That was an extra inducement for me to buy it," she explained.

"Well, that's what he said," Bertie declared to Bryce. "It was supposed to bring her lover to—" He stopped at the girl's appealing glance. "Well, anyway, she's always been crazy about you, and—"

"Bertie!"

"Well, about your work, anyway; so I thought that if the pencil had magic powers, this was a good time to get it working.

What *did* it write? I've asked you that ten times already. That's what we're interested in!"

V

Bryce did not tell what the pencil had written—he did not even admit that it had written anything. At least, not then. Looking back on it afterward, he always felt that he had consistently scouted the idea of oriental magic playing any part in his love for Ruth Dorrance. They were both normal, healthy individuals—certainly there was nothing "queer" about either of them. Their love was normal. Their friendship, ripening into love and courtship, had nothing unusual about it in any way; and yet, underneath it all, Bryce never ceased to wonder—for what the Yogi specifically predicted had come true.

Bertie was the first caller at their new home after the honeymoon. Bryce and Ruth had forgotten the pencil for the time; but Bertie evidently had not.

"You two ought to be mighty grateful to that magic pencil of yours," he declared with a grin. "That Yogi had the right dope, didn't he? Funny it never wrote anything that night!"

"It did," said Bryce; "but don't you ask us what."

He had told Ruth about it after they were engaged, and they had decided to keep the secret for themselves alone.

Bertie smiled calmly.

"I'm glad you admit it did write something," he said with sudden complacency. "You needn't tell me what. I know already. I ought to know, for I wrote it myself, with the pencil, that afternoon."

"You wrote—" Bryce was too much amazed to finish.

Ruth turned on her youthful cousin.

"Bertie! You little—"

"Don't you get abusive, Ruth," he interrupted. "Sure, I wrote it! I took you home that night and hustled right back. *You* were asleep," he added to Bryce. "I saw you through the window. I'd left the door unlatched when I went out before, and I sneaked in and put my story on your lap. Not such a bad piece of literature at that, was it?"

Bryce could only smile hopelessly.

"Well, *I* think it was pretty good stuff, anyway," said Bertie.

Ruth smiled at her husband lugubriously.

"And we thought the pencil was magic!"

"It *was* magic," Bertie declared. "Didn't it do just what the Yogi said it would? I only helped it out a little, that's all!"

LOVE AND AUTUMN

The falling leaf, the fading year,
  The woodland wearing masks of gold,
Like Agamemnon on his bier,
  And sudden arrows of strange cold,
  And mortal breath of rotting mold.

Veer and vanish
  Swift and swallow,
And the equinoctials banish
  Beauty from each hill and hollow;
  Must we follow,
And grow old?

Nay, belovèd, love like ours
Neither time nor death devours;
It may watch without misgiving
  All the coming and the going,
  All the fleeting and the flowing,
All the little short-breathed living;
  Fixed and fearless, unafraid,
  Though the very stars should fade!

Hilton Holmes

The Face of Filomena

AN EXCEPTION TO THE RULE THAT THERE IS LITTLE ROMANCE IN THE LIFE OF A POLICEMAN

By Charles B. Stilson

THERE is little romance in the life of a policeman. This is a general proposition. If it shall appear incredible, ask one of them, and hear him answer:

"Romance? Pshaw, where do you get that stuff?"

But, being a general proposition, there are exceptions. There is the case of MacMurrie, for instance.

At that, were you to question MacMurrie to-day concerning the transactions of a summer night when romance shed its silver halo upon him along with the moonlight, it is more than likely that he would grin and tell you that it was merely a tough night's work. But you and I will discard his prosaic and unimaginative description, and call it what it was—romance, pure and of the first water.

Patrolman MacMurrie wore badge No. 576, and was attached to the fourth precinct of Dorchester. For the purposes of romance, his name should have been Dugald, or at least Alexander. It was neither —it was John.

He was not a physical giant, nor was he particularly good-looking. He was a muscular, raw-boned chap of above medium height, with pale blue eyes, rusty hair, and freckles so large and so many on his face and body that one might have imagined he had stood naked where it was raining them.

Aside from certain racial tendencies, MacMurrie was no more and no less than several hundred brother policemen. One concession he offered to the patronage of the goddess invoked in the first paragraph —at the age of twenty-six he was still unmarried, though not fancy-free.

His charmer—to whom he had never addressed the spoken word, and whom he was unable for a long time to approve unreservedly—was one Filomena Trione.

Miss Trione worked every week-day in a seven-story factory, where she was one of scores of young women who performed mystic operations on fabulous numbers of men's trousers, with never a romantic speculation as to who might some day tenant the work of their hands. This is not to say that Miss Trione did not have notions. She was female, unwed, and under twenty. Moreover, she was a handsome girl. Her hair was black and her eyes were blacker; her lips were full and red; and her skin was of the classic olive which the sun may ripen, but never blemish. She had a figure, did Miss Trione, and knew how to clothe and carry it.

On her way home in the evening of her first day's employment at the tailoring establishment of Strauss & Stein, Miss Trione met Patrolman MacMurrie on his beat in Tracy Street.

It was their first encounter. To all appearances, it was a casual passing; but neither one was unconscious of the other. It was as characteristic of Filomena that she should arrive at a definite conclusion before she had taken five steps past the patrolman, as it was of MacMurrie that he should march on with a frown between his blue eyes and a sense of vague unease in his heart and mind.

After that, with the exception of Sundays, their meetings were nightly.

Filomena invariably saluted the patrolman with a heart-shocking glance of her black eyes and the beginnings of a smile on her beautiful face—behind which was considerable intelligence, as well as no small share of temper. Then she would pass on with heightened color, sometimes with a shrug of expressive shoulders, meant for MacMurrie, should he turn to gaze.

MacMurrie never turned; but his face, resolutely set to the front, for a few seconds

would resemble the cheek of a raw tomato liberally spattered with mustard.

His conscience began to trouble him; and, being a Scottish conscience, its trouble was real. It continually reminded him that Jean Ferguson, who did the table-work at his boarding-house, was an honest, sonsy lass, such as his dead father and mother in Glasgow would readily have approved as a daughter-in-law. He suspected, on the other hand, that his casting of sheep's eyes after the dusky daughter of Heth who had crossed his path was calculated to cause the parental relics to clatter in their coffins.

Several dozens of times he made up his mind to speak to Miss Ferguson—though thought of her never had stirred his pulses—and so to put the matter out of the realm of indecision; but always a vision of the liquid eyes and pouting lips of Filomena upset his resolutions.

So matters stood for three months, and it was August. MacMurrie had not opened his heart to Miss Ferguson. Neither had he spoken a word to Miss Trione; but he had come to the point where he touched his cap when they met—which, considering his state of conscience, was to be reckoned as considerable progress.

Filomena, used by blood and tradition to swift and ardent love-making, did not think it that. She became seized of a growing impatience against the provoking stupidity of her lover; for as lover she already classed him. Had she not selected him for herself at their first meeting? Had she not, peeping over her shoulder, often seen his neck and ears proclaim by their redness that his heart was aflame for her? What was he waiting for?

Her evening smile took on a tinge of threatening sharpness. There were pinpoints of wrath in her eyes, and her lips pouted more adorably than ever. What ailed the man?

Could it be that he considered himself above her? Impossible! Did not her father, by right of political prestige, hold a job as sidewalk inspector, making her the full social equal of this marching icicle in brass and blue?

Well, then? Often the shrug of Filomena's shapely shoulders was to the accompaniment of a fierce little oath.

Of these things MacMurrie was unconscious. He was too much occupied by his own conflicting emotions to give heed or analysis to the meaning in the girl's glances. His shooting in the periodical small-arms drills of the police became abominable.

II

Occasionally Filomena was accompanied by a younger sister—a child in braids, who came from home to meet her. At such times the patrolman was subjected to a double battery of black eyes; and he would hear the low, gurgling laughter of the girls behind him.

One evening a closed taxicab trailed slowly down Tracy Street and passed the Trione sisters as they met MacMurrie. Hostile eyes within the car took note of the girls' glances, and of the patrolman's salute and heightened color.

"It is time, indeed!" growled Giuseppe Feola to his sworn companion, Pasquale di Felice; and to Nicola Ansini, the driver: "Stop the car in Pine Street, Nick. We will take her from under the nose of this fool!"

Filomena and Lucia turned from Tracy Street and ran into the ambuscade of men waiting for them under the trees. The older girl shrieked once before a strong hand at her mouth deprived her of utterance; and she fought like a cat as she was dragged to the waiting car.

Lucia ran fleetly back into Tracy Street, her braids flying straight out behind her. At every third step she screamed.

Fifty feet from the corner she met Patrolman MacMurrie running with drawn revolver. He had heard Filomena's shriek. As he pulled up, the child flung herself at his feet and clasped his knees.

"Save my sister! Oh, for the love of the Madonna, save Filomena!" she wailed.

"What's the matter? What's happened? Where is she? Let go!" queried and commanded MacMurrie in a breath, trying vainly to release his legs. "Where is she?"

"They've taken her away in an auto—Joe Feola and two others. I knew him, if he did have a handkerchief tied over his face! Filomena wouldn't marry him; and now he will cut her face like Paolo Corsetti cut Amelita Bianchi's last winter! Oh, Madonna!"

And Lucia, relaxing her grasp, rolled fainting beside the walk.

MacMurrie remembered the case. As he ran on toward Pine Street, he saw in imagination the darkly beautiful face of Filomena with the crimson weal of a knife-

slash seamed across it from its pouting red lips to its dainty ear. MacMurrie's pale eyes began to blaze.

Pine Street is long, and leads to the open country. Far down it the patrolman could see the fleeing taxicab gaining speed with every revolution of its wheels.

Attracted by Lucia's screams, a crowd was assembling. No one knew what had happened, and every one wanted to know. MacMurrie was volleyed with questions which he did not heed.

A young man in a low speedster runabout turned from the continuation of Tracy Street into Pine and slowed up alongside the curb. MacMurrie sprang upon the running-board.

"Don't stop!" he ordered, and pointed north. "Keep that taxi in sight if you have to blow a lung out of your car. The city 'll pay the damages!"

"No taxi in this burg can feed this boat its dust," proclaimed the driver, pressing his toe on the accelerator. "I been pulled three times a'ready for lettin' her out!"

"You'll be pinched this time if you don't!" retorted MacMurrie grimly, lifting his long legs over the door and settling into the seat.

"What's the game, anyway?" asked the young man, as the machine shot forward. He glanced curiously from the patrolman's tight-lipped face to the revolver which he had not thought to put away.

Never taking his eyes from the far-away taxicab, MacMurrie told him, and they followed swiftly on through the gathering twilight of the summer evening.

Persistent upon the screen of MacMurrie's imagination was the picture of Filomena's face with a red scar gashed across her olive cheek; and he made a resolve which, though it was couched in the vernacular, was none the less a vow. It was that, had such or worse profanation been accomplished, he would forget his duty as a policeman to the extent of paying the doer of the deed in hot leaden coin, let the consequences be what they might.

Beyond the city limits, Pine Street merged into the Morton Road, a well-traveled thoroughfare leading to the lake. It was much frequented by automobilists, and was effectively patroled by motor-cycle constables. When he reached it, Nick Ansini drove his taxicab with more caution; and MacMurrie and his companion had little difficulty in trailing.

Three miles out, the taxicab turned east into another road, which was scarcely more than a lane, and which meandered off to an indefinite nowhere between the back fields of farms and small patches of woodland.

Before they left the main road, MacMurrie ordered his driver to turn off his lights. He knew that the presence of another car in this little-used byway would at once announce to the members of the taxicab party that they had been followed, and would defeat his purpose.

It was rough going, and both cars barely crept along. MacMurrie rode in glum silence, his eyes fixed on the red tail-light which bobbed and wavered on ahead.

III

WHEN the pursuers rounded the third curve, they saw the rays of the taxicab headlights, a few hundred yards in advance, swing from the roadway and flash for an instant upon a small, lonely house which stood among tall grass and stunted trees not far from the road. The machine was turning in.

"Shut off—quick, before they stop and hear us!" said MacMurrie.

The speedster drifted into the shadow of a clump of trees beside the road and halted. MacMurrie jumped out, and the young man made preparations to accompany him.

"No, you stay here," directed the patrolman. "I'm going to take a look around. If I'm not back in half an hour, you pull out of here as quietly as you know how. Beat it to the nearest place where you can get a phone, and ask police headquarters to send a car-load of help—and thank you kindly for what you've done already!"

"But say, I'm game to go with you and see the fun," protested the youth, who had armed himself with an enormous wrench from under the seat.

"Sure you are—but you do as I say," enjoined MacMurrie, and slipped away through the shadows.

He crouched along tumble-down fences until he was close upon the house. The lights of the taxicab had been extinguished; but two windows on the lower floor of the house were illuminated, and served to locate the building.

When he came near, the patrolman climbed a fence, took to the whispering cover of a field of corn, and entered the premises from the rear, passing between a

ramshackle barn and a malodorous pigsty. He prayed that there might be no dog, and he met none.

Stars were twinkling overhead, and the moon was promising to show its face soon. MacMurrie could make out the dim outlines of the taxicab in the drive beside the house. He groped his way to it, and found it empty.

Voices in animated conversation sounded very near him. He crossed the drive, and from the deeper shadow of a garden orchard he reconnoitered.

Through the open windows of what appeared to be a sparsely furnished living-room he saw four swarthy men, three young and one old, seated around a clothless table, upon which stood a tall bottle of contraband. All four were talking, gesticulating, and applying themselves frequently to the bottle. MacMurrie could not hear what they were saying, nor did he greatly care. No sign of Filomena was apparent. He must look for her!

He worked his way back through the orchard and crossed the yard again by the old barn. Four to one was unduly heavy odds. Discretion dictated that he should return to the waiting speedster and go for reenforcements.

But MacMurrie was a fair specimen of a breed which, while it always exercises due caution and does not eagerly seek trouble, nevertheless, once having come upon it, will go with it to the very end of the road. He could not possibly leave the house until he should have satisfied himself of the plight of the girl.

She must be up-stairs, where he could see a dim light glowing on the other side of the house. Skirting the pigsty and a chicken-house where hens clucked sleepily, he crept forward. Good fortune led him to the discovery of a short, home-made ladder, such as is used to pick fruit from low trees. It was leaning against a rickety grape-trellis near the end of the hen-house. He shouldered it and carried it with him.

Close under the window, which was open, he set the ladder upright in the long grass and rested it with infinite caution against the clapboarded wall of the house. He removed his shoes, hung them in a pear-tree, thrust his revolver into the waistband of his trousers, and addressed himself to the climb.

By standing on the topmost rung of the ladder and extending his arms to their utmost, he found that he could hook his fingers firmly over the sill of the window. Slowly he tensed his muscles and began to raise himself.

He was annoyed by the unpleasant reflection that the top of his head rising over the sill would present a very fair target to the bullet or blade of any one who might be lurking in the room above him. It was probably ten seconds, though it had seemed as many minutes, before his straining arms had lifted him so that his eyes were above the level of the sill.

A smoking kerosene lamp with its wick turned low stood upon a keg near the window. By its light MacMurrie saw that the room was small and bare. Other than the keg, there was no furniture, and the floor was uncarpeted. There was one door, and it was closed.

Against the baseboard, directly opposite the window, the body of a woman lay as if it had been flung there. Her back was toward MacMurrie; but he recognized the pink, filmy waist and dark skirt, the trim, silk-clad ankles, and a mass of hair that lay like a rippled pool of ink upon the floor.

That sight completely unnerved MacMurrie. His muscles relaxed, he bumped his chin upon the window-sill, and slipped back the length of his arms, dangling against the side of the house. His groping feet struck the uprights of the ladder, disturbed its balance, and it scraped along the clapboards and fell to the ground. A dog barked inside the house.

Two courses were left to MacMurrie—to let himself fall after the ladder, or to pull himself up into the room. Caution as much as bravery pointed to the latter. He feared that the fall of the ladder had been heard by other ears than the dog's, and that the men in the house might come upon him suddenly before he could recover from his fall, or hunt for him with the dog before he could make his escape. With his revolver, he might hope to hold the room until help should come.

Behind this hasty reasoning was his unalterable purpose to call these rascals to a stern accounting for what they had done to Filomena.

Again he tightened his muscles—quickly this time—drew himself up, and sprawled through the window as quietly as possible. As he breasted the sill, the revolver, which his exertions had worked loose from its place in his waistband, slipped down the

inside of his trouser-leg, and fell with a soft *plump* in the grass.

At that luckless desertion, MacMurrie swore bitterly to himself. He was in a fine pickle — pitted against four desperadoes, and with no more effective weapon than a rosewood club, a small billy, and his pocket-knife!

IV

Some one was stirring below-stairs. A door was opened, and the dog ran out into the road, barking violently. MacMurrie ducked below the window sill as two men came around the corner of the house from the front.

"See, there is nothing here!" said one of them in the voice of an old man. "You are nervous. I heard nothing."

"But I tell you I did, and so did the dog," returned the other impatiently.

MacMurrie was thankful that the long grass concealed the fallen ladder. A horse stamped noisily in the barn.

"There! What's that?"

"Ho, ho!" laughed the old man. "It's nothing but the horse. Come along in, now; I have two more bottles of—"

The voice died away around the house, and MacMurrie breathed more freely. Now, if it were not for the accursed dog, which they had left outside, he might drop back down there and recover his revolver. The animal was white. He could see it racing back and forth along the road. What was to be his next move?

While he deliberated, crouched beside the smoking lamp, three things happened. The moon came out brightly; he heard the distant purring of a motor, and down the white road saw the speedster backing slowly around the curve; and behind him something stirred and rustled on the floor.

He twisted around, his hands clenched and his nerves jangling. Events had crowded so swiftly since he had thrust his head over the window-sill that they had driven Filomena into the background of his mind.

When he turned, the girl had struggled up and was sitting against the wall. He stared as if she had been a ghost. She had been bound most efficiently with a length of clothes-line; and her big eyes blazed at him over a strip of white cloth which obscured her other features.

With the thought that he had come too late—that the bandage concealed a cruelly gashed cheek—MacMurrie shuddered and groaned.

He crossed the chamber and cut her bonds. Filomena's nimble fingers stripped away the gag—it was nothing more—and revealed her face, unscarred and beautiful. MacMurrie drew a great breath of relief.

Immediately, however, he was almost led to regret the removal of the cloth; for it set free a flow of language which he was at some pains to hush to whispers. The girl was frantic with rage and fear.

"It's Joe Feola!" she hissed, getting to her feet and facing MacMurrie. "He wants to make me marry him—the dog!" Filomena forgot herself, and stamped her foot on the floor. "But I won't—won't—*won't!* See how he treats me! And he threatens to cut my face with his knife! As if I would marry him if he cut my head off my body! *Pah!* But it is all right now that *you* are here."

Filomena laid hold of the edges of MacMurrie's coat, and recognized that it was good cloth. She came a step nearer and hid her face against it at his shoulder.

MacMurrie, with his chin in her hair and his eyes on the door, felt an unwonted warmth in his Scottish veins, and yielded to it. His arms went around her and tightened. Filomena gurgled and snuggled. She was no longer afraid. She felt a vast confidence and pride in this rusty-headed fellow with the pale blue eyes and the curiously spotted face. He had followed on alone when her peril was great. He must be brave; he must love her. His arms felt strong. Filomena pulled his head down and kissed him.

"You will go down soon and kill them all!" she whispered. "Is it not so?"

MacMurrie was dizzy, but not so dizzy as that. He was silent, thinking.

Should he drop back out there, set up the ladder again, and try to escape with the girl? Against that plan was the presence of the dog. It would surely hear him and give the alarm. He might not be able to find his revolver at once, and the men might come up and seize the girl before he could get her out. He dared not risk leaving her.

To remain where they were was almost equally perilous. The loss of the revolver had complicated the situation tenfold. Four to one, when the one has only a club and the four are presumably provided with guns, is unpleasant odds, outside of a photo-play; yet here was Filomena with her

head on his chest, inclined to the more romantic view, and urging him to deeds of valor which his caution did not favor.

Footsteps on the stairs saved his face with the girl.

"Quick—lie down there where you were!" he told her.

She caught the idea, kissed him once more, and slipped to the floor with her face to the wall. MacMurrie, prudently reflecting that any damage to his uniform would come out of his pocket, removed his coat and hung it on a nail. Then he placed himself where the opening door would conceal him, gripped his club, and waited.

It was Giuseppe Feola who entered, his face inflamed by wine and evil thoughts.

As he was closing the door behind him, MacMurrie, shifting his club to his left hand, struck Feola under the ear with his right fist, with all his weight behind the blow. It was a hard blow, precisely placed. For the time being Giuseppe lost all interest in his earthly misdoings. MacMurrie snapped his handcuffs on the man's wrists, tied his ankles with a piece of the clothes-line, gagged him, and stowed him in a corner.

"See if he's got a gun on him; I lost mine," he directed Filomena, and went to the door to listen.

Filomena searched. The patrolman turned from his listening-post in time to prevent her from giving Feola his reward in full with a knife which she had found in his pocket. MacMurrie twisted the weapon away from her and tossed it out through the window. Filomena cursed him affectionately, kissed him again, and thrust into his hand a heavy-calibered revolver.

"That's the girl!" he said, responding awkwardly to her caress. "But you let me do the fighting. I know these guys were givin' you a raw deal, and they're goin' to get theirs for it; but there ain't goin' to be no killin', not if I can help it—see?"

"All right, my friend," answered Filomena submissively.

So long as he loved her, he might do as he pleased, she thought; but at the first opportunity she would give him lessons in kissing!

V

Not many minutes elapsed before Pasquale di Felice stumbled up the stairs, to ascertain what might be keeping Feola so long from the bottles. Again MacMurrie stood at the ready behind the door, this time with more assurance, engendered by the feel of the revolver butt in his fingers.

He timed his blow excellently; but Pasquale was a sturdy rogue. Though he staggered and fell, he did not entirely lose his senses, and with his heels he made a prodigious clattering upon the bare floor. While MacMurrie hastily knotted what was left of the clothes-line around the limbs of his second captive, he heard a third man run up the stairs.

This was Ansini. He had not drunk so deeply as his companions, but had saved his wits to operate his car. They led him to be cautious. When his friends failed to answer his calls, he did not rush on and enter the trap, but paused at the head of the staircase to think it over. From that position he conferred with the old man, who had remained below.

A quavering female voice on the upper floor also joined in the discussion. It was apparent that they were puzzled. The old man called in the dog.

Behind his door MacMurrie thought swiftly. It came to his mind that chance offered a rare opportunity to distinguish himself. Help would be coming to him soon; but why not forestall it? Why share the glory? Single-handed, he had effected the capture of two men. One more—for he counted the old man as nothing—would make the affair complete.

His suddenly aroused ambition impelled the patrolman to a rashness to which he was ordinarily a stranger. He took his flash-lamp from his coat pocket and blew out the other light. After a whispered word with Filomena, he noiselessly opened the door and jumped into the hall.

His precipitate appearance set events to moving.

An old woman who stood in the doorway of a bedroom farther along the hall greeted him with a yell, backed into the room, slammed the door, twisted the key, and began to pray through her nose.

Nick Ansini, at the top of the stairs, crouched, and his hand swooped to his hip pocket.

"Drop it, and hands up!" promptly shouted MacMurrie.

Light for these happenings had been supplied by the old man, who held a lamp at the foot of the stairs. At the sound of the policeman's voice he puffed out the light and urged on his dog.

In the darkness MacMurrie slipped along the wall toward the stairs. There was not an instant to be lost. He could hear the dog's toe-nails rattling on the board steps, and he knew that Ansini must be ready to shoot. Holding his flash-lamp at the length of his left arm, he pressed its button.

By the brief illumination he saw that the dog—an ugly white brute—had reached the upper floor and was charging, and that Ansini, kneeling on the steps, had leveled his pistol. MacMurrie shot the dog through the chest and stretched it kicking, and dropped to his hands and knees. The narrow hallway echoed to a double report, as Ansini's bullet shattered a panel of the door by which the patrolman had emerged.

"Drop that gun!" ordered MacMurrie again, at the same time leaping forward.

Ansini did not obey, and his second shot seared the patrolman's shoulder; but MacMurrie had reached the stairway at last. As he had told Filomena, he did not intend that there should be any killing, if he could prevent it. He did not find it expedient to communicate that humane resolve to Ansini. Thrusting both revolver and flash-lamp under that worthy's nose, for the third time he summoned the fellow to lay down his weapon, on pain of instant dissolution.

Overawed, Ansini let the revolver go, and it clattered on the steps; but when he felt the hand of the law on his shoulder, the taxicab-driver's desperation flared, and he grappled. MacMurrie let fall both lamp and pistol, threw his arms around his opponent, and they rolled down the stairs together.

MacMurrie's last impression was that he had reached the bottom first, and that immediately afterward the house had been struck by lightning.

When he came to himself, a lighted lamp stood on the floor beside him, and Filomena was pouring water into his face from a tin dipper. A little distance away lay Ansini, completely subdued by a blow on the head which Filomena, coming upon him while he was dazed from the fall, had dealt him with the patrolman's revolver.

In the upper bedroom the old woman was still praying nasally, to the accompaniment of the groans of Pasquale di Felice, who had not been gagged. The old man had disappeared.

MacMurrie stood up; and Filomena, who had battled so pluckily in his behalf, screamed and nearly fainted at sight of the widening blotch of crimson on his shirt-sleeve. Again she kissed him—her favorite remedy—and forthwith ruined a new seven-dollar petticoat to provide a bandage for the injury, which was trivial.

With her aid, MacMurrie loaded his trio of prisoners into the tonneau of the taxicab, and he took the wheel. Near the Morton Road he met two police automobiles loaded with men who had come too late to garner any glory from the exploit of which he had been the bright particular star.

MacMurrie—this long time Sergeant MacMurrie—is the father of three children. Two of them are curly headed, black-eyed little maids, the clear olive of whose skins the sun may darken, but never freckle. The third and eldest—proof that the Scottish blood, when warmed, is assertive—is a sandy-haired urchin with polka-dots upon his countenance nearly as large as his blue eyes.

THE YELLOW LAND

I WALKED amid the yellow land,
  And very lone and sad was I,
Though beauty stood on every hand
  To catch my drear autumnal eye.

But what to me were autumn leaves,
  Like Solomon in all his glory,
Who just had come to the sad end
  Of living's latest, loveliest story?

For happy folk the world is fair;
  But swift its beauty turns to pain,
When you've just parted from the girl
  Your eyes shall never see again.

Nicholas Breton

Information, Please!

THE STORY OF A LONG CHASE AND A SURPRISING CAPTURE

By C. C. Waddell

A CHAUFFEUR'S conversation, like ancient Gaul, is usually divided into three parts — himself, his "bus," and his boss. As to himself, there is never any question. Though he says it who perhaps shouldn't, if there is any bird that can put anything over on him, either in mechanical knowledge or dexterity of driving, such bird has yet to flit across his horizon.

As to the "old boat"—well, she's running pretty good now, but look what he had to do to her!

As to his boss, he dispenses to all and sundry a mass of more intimate detail than could probably be gathered from the books of the recording angel.

Smiler Foster, true to form, sat in Kelly's Eureka Garage in Los Angeles, and discoursed to a group of his confrères upon the mental, moral, physical, and social shortcomings of Dr. Herschel Sprague, the eminent New York specialist, from whom he drew seventy-five berries a week, exclusive of tire graft and other conventional perquisites.

Listening to Smiler in a detached, uninterested way was a small, dark chauffeur who had charge of a car fully as ornate and expensive as Dr. Sprague's big twin-six Duvassy, but who, strangely enough, discussed neither it, himself, nor his employer.

Possibly, this very taciturnity and indifference was assumed to spur the garrulous Smiler into fuller disclosures. There is an art in merely listening, if one knows how to use it.

"The old hyena!" Smiler railed, while he caressed one smartly putteed calf and blew a cloud of cigarette smoke at the "Positively No Smoking" sign. "He ain't human, I tell you. Why, I seen him come away from the hospital after he'd operated on his own daughter for appendicitis, and you couldn't no more tell from his face how things had went than if he'd been carving up a rib-roast. When I asks him sympathetic how Miss Ethel had come through, he snaps at me:

"'What do you want to know for? To tell that puppy Bullard, I suppose? He can wait!'

"And he keeps me stuck in the car all afternoon, with never a chance even to see this Dave Bullard, who's the girl's sweetheart, and who's waiting for me over at the g'rage, all worked up to a frazzle, not knowing whether she's alive or dead. It would 'a' been worth at least a ten-dollar bill to me to tip him off that she was still breathing; but what does the doc care?"

Mr. Foster recrossed his legs and massaged the other calf.

"Cold-blooded! You tap a vein anywhere on that guy, and if you don't draw ice-water may I never see Forty-Second Street again! The only thing that 'll warm him up is the sight of a new rock that he thinks he can add to that diamond collection of his."

The little dark man still made no comment, unless a sudden and elusive glint in his eyes and an almost imperceptible stiffening to attention could be so classed; yet, as if yielding to some intangible spell, Smiler fairly ransacked his memory for incidents to illustrate the distinctive traits and idiosyncrasies of Dr. Sprague.

It was disclosed by him that the specialist's present motor trip through California, although ostensibly undertaken to aid his daughter's convalescence, was really for the purpose of breaking the attachment existing between her and Dave Bullard, a young New York newspaperman, whom the doctor persisted in regarding as a conscienceless fortune-hunter.

"What's the girl like?" asked one of the group of chauffeurs.

"That's the mystery of it!" Mr. Foster shook his head. "How that old crab

ever come to draw a daughter like Miss Ethel goes beyond me. There ain't no movie queen at Hollywood got it over her for looks, and she's just as nice and sweet as she is pretty. Into the bargain, Bullard ain't afraid to tell the world that she's true blue. He banks on her sticking to him, for all the old man's nagging and scheming. But "— lighting another cigarette — "you know how girls is, even the best of them. Mebbe the old doc's got it doped out right, after all. What with the travelin' around, and this here California climate, and meetin' a lot of new fellows, and all, I don't rate Bullard no better than a five-to-six shot, if that—eh, what, as we say at the Lambs Club!"

As an organ responds to the touch of a master player upon its stops and keys, so Smiler, seemingly obedient to the silent, concentrated influence bent upon him, shifted abruptly from this finished strain and reverted to the subject of the diamond collection and the doctor's eccentricities in regard to it.

He boasted, as was common report, that it contained some of the most valuable stones in America, although the fact was hard to verify, since the owner, with a churlish secretiveness, never exhibited his treasures. Apparently he was free from any desire to outshine or gloat over rivals and competitors. With him, the joy of possession was enough; so a diamond acquired by Dr. Sprague was, like the snowflake on the river, "one moment seen, then gone forever."

Naturally, this made him an ideal customer for those who had gems of dubious proprietorship or antecedents to dispose of.

"Not no cheap crooks nor stick-up men, of course," Smiler qualified. "Doc's too wise for that; but there's stones that come out of South Africa on the Q. T., and others that ain't had no duty paid on 'em; and sometimes a big job is pulled off on the other side that's a clean get-away. It's guys of that sort he does business with—quiet-dressed lads with low voices and eyes that don't do no talking; but don't you never think they put anything over on him. I'll say they don't! I've caught more than one earful when doc had 'em out in the car with him, and I know!"

So Mr. Foster ran on and on; but even the weariest river winds somewhere safe to sea, and he finally paused, his fund of anecdote and commentary spun dry. His audience had gradually disintegrated during the course of his monolog. At the last, there was left to listen only the little dark man of repressed speech.

Smiler arose and stretched himself, with the observation that since he was due for an early start in the morning, it might be prudent to hit the hay.

The other joined him as he started for the door, and for the first time addressed him with a direct remark.

"Off in the morning, eh?" he repeated carelessly. "Where do we go from here?"

"Up the ridge road to Bakersfield and Oakland. We've pretty well finished up the south, you see, and now the boss is figuring on heading up the coast to Portland and Seattle.. Then we'll go back through the Yellowstone down to Minneapolis and St. Paul, and, mebbe, through to Chicago."

"That so? Then probably we'll meet again. My boss is followin' about the same route."

"Good enough!" Smiler nodded cheerfully. "Well, this is where I turn off. So-long! Don't forget to look me up, if we're both together in Frisco."

II

It was fated, however, that they were to meet sooner than that; for the next morning, as Smiler was breezing along a few miles out of Los Angeles, he encountered a car stalled at the side of the road, and poking around under its hood was the same little dark chauffeur.

Even so frigid a proposition as Dr. Sprague does not callously pass by a fellow motorist in distress. The natural result was a halt, and an inquiry as to whether assistance could be rendered.

The owner of the balky machine—an unmistakable Englishman in motor-togs which spelled Bond Street in every wrinkle—stared and hesitated. He was obviously annoyed over the delay, but unwilling to put himself under obligation.

"Quite good of you," he said stiffly; "but scarcely necessary to bother. My man here is a first-class mechanic, and although we seem to have struck a nasty bit of engine trouble, he'll no doubt work it out."

The doctor waved an authoritative hand. "Foster, take a look at it."

Smiler promptly descended to join the little, dark chauffeur in his investigations under the hood. While these two prodded

here and there, and wrangled as to the cause of the difficulty, the Englishman expressed his appreciation of the civility with a chilliness of manner which was a fair match for the doctor's own.

His thanks were not effusive, and he seemed to be concerned solely about getting on his way; yet Ethel Sprague, leaning back in the tonneau of the Duvassy, somehow gathered the impression that he was more interested in her father and herself than he cared to let appear. Trust a woman's intuition to probe beneath the surface of things!

Still retaining somewhat the manner of an invalid in her relaxed pose, she studied him covertly from under her half-closed lids. He was tall and fair, with a bronzed, ruddy complexion — an extremely personable young man, on the whole, except that his blue eyes, so Ethel decided, were set a bit too close together.

They say that every unmarried woman considers any man she meets in the light of a potential husband; but if any speculations of the sort were roving through Miss Sprague's mind, those narrowly separated eyes served as an effective veto. She much preferred Dave Bullard's wide-awake, straightforward gaze.

However, she had scant time even to consider the question; for Smiler soon discovered the cause of the engine difficulty. With that righted, the Englishman stayed only to mutter a curt acknowledgment to the doctor and to lift his cap stiffly to Ethel. Then he sped away, as if trying to burn up the road in his effort to recover lost time.

The matter of his eyes was really of no consequence, she reflected as she and her father followed at a more leisurely pace. It was merely a chance encounter of the road, and the odds were strong that she would never see the man again.

Once more, though, destiny took a hand. Three days later, at a hotel in San Francisco, Dr. Sprague found in his room a small leather bag which did not belong to him.

Inquiry at the desk of the floor-clerk developed the information that the gentleman occupying No. 636 had been somewhat excitedly seeking a missing bag of that description. The doctor found the door of that particular room, and rapped upon it. To his surprise, his knock was answered by the tall young Englishman to whom he had given assistance on the road.

He was even more taken aback by the man's behavior. No sooner did the fellow set eyes on the bag in the doctor's hand than he grabbed it and, without a word, jumped back inside the room, unceremoniously slamming the door in his benefactor's face.

Dr. Sprague was unaccustomed to such cavalier treatment. He stood gaping a moment at the closed portal, uncertain what to do; then, highly incensed, stalked off to his own room.

That evening, in the lobby of the hotel, the offender approached him and offered a belated apology.

"'Fraid I was a bit uncivil, what?" he said diffidently. "Didn't tell you how grateful I was, and all that sort of thing; but really, don't you know, that bag had a lot of jewels in it—the Buckmaster diamond, for one, if you know what I mean—and of course—"

Dr. Sprague had listened stonily unmoved up to this point. His outraged dignity could conceive no possible excuse or palliation for the affront he had received; but there are some things that not even chilled steel can withstand.

"The Buckmaster diamond!"

His eyes bulged. That famous stone, he was aware in the mysterious way that gem-fanciers have of acquiring such information, had recently been disposed of at private sale; but the identity of its purchaser had so far remained a baffling secret. And now this stuttering Englishman blandly announced that he was carrying it around in a bag which he had blunderingly let get mislaid!

"Ah?" The other nodded. "I see you know what I'm talking about. Beastly careless of me, of course, carrying stones around like that in a bag! Usually have 'em in a canvas belt around my waist; but I'd sent the belt to be repaired, and the thick-headed porter here in the hotel took the bag to the wrong room. You can fancy how anxious I was, and how, when you brought it back, my first thought was to see that the stones were safe."

"Naturally," the doctor agreed more affably than any one who knew him would have believed possible. "Say no more about the matter, sir. I can understand just how you felt."

It is a peculiar trait of human nature to be drawn toward the person on whom we are able to confer a favor—more so, in

many cases, than to the person who confers a favor on us. Dr. Sprague had not one but two acts of kindness to his credit against the Englishman; and neither of them had cost him anything.

His face relaxed—about to the extent that might reasonably be expected of a mummy, but with him it was a sign of mellow geniality.

"I, too, am a lover of diamonds," he said. "Possibly you have heard of me? I am Dr. Herschel Sprague, of New York."

The Englishman stared blankly.

"Quite so!" he gulped. "Quite so!"

He hesitated a moment uneasily; then, muttering a halting excuse, sheered hastily away.

Dr. Sprague, upon reflection, didn't think any the worse of him for that. It was exactly the way he would have behaved himself, if some unidentified stranger had come up and introduced himself as a fellow diamond-fancier.

However, he was of no mind to be balked by any such standoffishness from cultivating the acquaintance of the buyer of the Buckmaster diamond. He must find out who the fellow was, and arrange in some way to be presented to him.

With this idea in view, he approached the desk; but there was little to be gleaned there beyond the name "B. Heathcock," inscribed on the register, with an entirely superfluous "London" after it. Neither did inquiry in other available quarters yield results. The head waiter, the doorman, the henna-haired maid at the cigar-counter, the bell-hops, even under the prospect of largesse, were unable to furnish additional information.

There had been no telephone-messages and no callers for No. 636. The occupant, so the doctor was told, kept pretty much to his rooms when he was in the hotel, "and didn't have nothing to say to nobody." Apparently the only person with whom he held other than necessary communication was his chauffeur.

Dr. Sprague, unaccustomed to be thwarted in his desires, was annoyed. Frowningly he commented upon his ill-success in the matter to his daughter at breakfast the next morning.

"If you want to find out who the man is," she suggested, "why don't you ask Foster?"

"Foster?" He glanced up irritably. "How would Foster know?"

"Foster knows everything"—with a quizzical smile. "Haven't you learned that yet?"

The doctor merely sniffed and hurriedly finished his coffee. He had an invitation that morning to witness a rare and delicate operation at one of the city hospitals, and he was already late. Nevertheless, when he went out to where Smiler was waiting with the car, he paused with one foot on the step.

"Er—Foster, do you happen to recall stopping on the road the day we left Los Angeles to help out some people in a stalled car? The owner, if I remember, was a youngish man—an Englishman, possibly?"

"Oh, yes, sir! That was Captain Sir Barton Heathcock, of the British army. He got pretty well knocked out with shell-shock during the war, and he's motoring around over here to get himself in shape again."

The doctor stared at Foster with unwilling respect.

"And where the devil did you discover all that?" he demanded.

"Over at the garage, sir. You've got no idea"—virtuously—"how some of them chauffeurs do talk! There ain't nothing too private for 'em to tell about their bosses."

The doctor made no comment upon this, other than to give some curt directions for reaching the hospital whither he was bound. Then, entering the car, he leaned back against the cushions. He was less interested in the indiscretions of chauffeurs than in planning how he was to arrange his meeting with Captain Sir Barton Heathcock.

Smiler, however, had further information to impart. For the moment he was engrossed in negotiating a ticklish bit of roadway on one of San Francisco's hills; but as soon as he had straightened away, he turned to the doctor.

"They've beat it," he announced; then, at the blank stare of his employer: "I mean this here Sir Barton and his car."

"Beat it?" The doctor started. "Gone, do you mean?" Was he then to lose his chance of seeing, of possibly handling, the Buckmaster diamond? "When?" he exclaimed wildly. "Where?"

"This morning—off north. Just where they're fixing to make their stops I didn't ask; but his chauffeur told me back at Los Angeles that they're following about the same route that we are."

The operation that morning was one the doctor had been anxious to see, and as a piece of skilful surgery it left nothing to be desired; but he gave it only the most perfunctory attention, and as soon as it was over he broke away with almost indecent haste and hurried back to the hotel.

"Ethel," he burst in upon his daughter, "pack up! We are leaving at once!"

"Leaving?" She stared at him. "But I thought you were planning to stay here for several days?"

"I've changed my mind. Er—that is, I am satisfied this climate will do you no good—these fogs, you know, and the high winds. The sooner we get away the better!"

III

ETHEL did not understand it at all. Her father was usually as calculated in his program as a calendar. She had always believed that anything jumpy or impulsive was abhorrent to him; but during the next week or so she began to think she had strangely misread his character.

Hitherto, in deference to her supposed frailty of physique, they had traveled at a leisurely pace, with frequent stops; but now he was continually urging speed, and he seemed to grudge every moment that they were off the road. Their itinerary was being constantly changed. Arriving at some place where they had arranged to spend the night, he would merely give a glance at the hotel register and then order Smiler to drive forty or fifty miles farther.

The latter, more astute than Ethel—or possibly only more inquisitive—soon surmised, from the directions given him and from the questions he overheard, the object of their search, although a strain of romance in him led him to misinterpret its purpose. As a result, Dave Bullard in New York received a gaudy picture post-card of the Cascade Mountains, bearing the somewhat disquieting message:

The old weasel is wearing us out chasing a lime-juicer lord for a son-in-law. Watch me lose the limey!

Although Smiler's intentions were undoubtedly of the best, he failed to take into account two very vital factors. One was the stubbornness of the doctor's will to achieve; the other, a possible disinclination on the part of Sir Barton—for all his seeming coyness—to being "lost."

Certain it is that in the merry game of hare and hounds which the two played up from San Francisco across the territory of three States, whenever the trail seemed hopelessly lost, and the doctor was at his wit's end to know which way to turn next, some clue would always show up, "at the crucible moment," as Smiler said, to guide the chase anew.

So at last it befell that in Dave Bullard's mail one morning there shimmered an opaline representation of Seattle Harbor—green waves curling in the sunshine, azure sky, buff and magenta wharves, and purple hulls—which by contrast only intensified the gloomy confession of failure on the back:

I lost out! Doc nailed his man here at Seattle last night, and they're thicker than a couple of boot-leggers. Will keep you posted.

He did. From that time on there came an almost daily series of colorful communications — polychromatic representations of Snoqualami Pass, Mount Rainier, falls at Spokane, smelters at Butte, each bearing its message of disaster:

Doc had Sir Barton to dinner with him last night and introduced him to Miss E. Looks like she'd fell for him. I heard doc ask her to-day what she thought of him, and she said he satisfied all her ideals of the British aristocracy.

Sir B. rode all day with us to-day. She's teaching him American slang.

Sir B. rode with us again to-day. Doc tried to horn in and talk diamonds, but got pocketed on the first lap. All the diamonds Sir B. is thinking about is a solitary for somebody's finger.

Looks like Sir B. cops the stakes. I knocked him to her to-day, told her the piker had only come across to me with one stingy two-case note, and that I heard him ask his chauffeur for the commission on some parts. She said she gloried in his spunk. Not so good, eh?

Finally there arrived a couple of snapshots from the Yellowstone. On the back of one was written:

Sir B. and Miss E. feeding bears along Snake River Road.

It showed Ethel tantalizing two of the shaggy brown beggars with a piece of cake, which she held over the side of the car, while Sir Barton leaned protectingly above her. The other was inscribed:

Sir B. and Miss E. at Old Faithful.

It portrayed Miss Sprague clinging somewhat timidly to her companion's arm as she gazed at the spouting geyser.

Bullard, scrutinizing the pictures with a jealous eye, was bound to admit that Ethel did not appear to be repining over her separation from him. In her letters she professed to miss him terribly; but these portraits, both of which were excellent photographs, showed her looking extremely fit and free from care. Hang it, she must have taken on fully fifteen pounds in weight!

Her letters, too, he recalled, had mentioned Sir Barton only casually, and as an acquaintance of her father's; yet here he was smirking and grinning about her with all the air of an acknowledged fiancé.

That "smirking and grinning," it must be confessed, was rather by way of inference than strictly a matter of record; for in both photographs Sir Barton had worn his cap in such a way as pretty effectually to shield his face from the camera. The circumstance caught Dave's attention; and being on the lookout for anything to his rival's disadvantage, he fell to wondering about it.

"Almost looks as if m' lud was trying to hide his map," he muttered. "S'pose there's a reason?"

Of course it might be mere British diffidence; and then again it might be something else. At any rate, it gave Dave an idea.

Naturally he had already looked up Sir Barton Heathcock in Burke, to be rather appalled by the list of his estates and connections; but now he spent an afternoon in the "morgue" of his newspaper delving into "Who's-Who" records of a somewhat different complexion.

His research, however, whatever the result of it, proved unnecessary; for by the very next mail he received from Billings, Montana, a post-card of a cattle-ranch with this jubilant communication—a message of steers and cheers, Dave termed it:

Lafayette, we are there! Sir B. gets the brown derby. He told doc that he had important business calling him back to New York, and would probably sail for England in a few days. And he has went. Doc grouchier than if a millionaire patient had gone to Christian Science; but I and Miss E. are bearing up bravely.

Again, though, Smiler's reading of the situation was tinged by a stubborn insistence upon romance. Why is it that so few of us can take events at their face value, but demand that they shall accommodate themselves to the stock motivation of a photo-play?

As a matter of fact, Sir Barton's departure was not due to his rejection as a suitor for the hand of Miss Sprague. Smiler and Dave Bullard probably pictured a scene with their heroine registering regretful compassion as she slowly shook her head. Then a subtitle: "I am sorry, Sir Barton, but—" And finally a fade-in of Dave, as the crestfallen baronet took his leave.

Truth compels a less satisfying version. The order of the raspberry was not conferred by Ethel; she did not have the opportunity. What really happened was that Sir Barton, somewhat flustered, and with a yellow Western Union envelope sticking out of his pocket, encountered the doctor at the entrance to the hotel in Billings.

"Oh, there you are!" The Briton paused in his hurried progress. "Want you to say good-by to Miss Sprague for me. Charmed to have met her, and all that sort of thing!"

"Good-by?" The doctor gasped. "You don't mean to say that you are leaving us, Sir Barton?"

"Yes—just got a wire callin' me to New York. Train leaves in twenty minutes. Got to move some, what?"

The doctor clung to his sleeve.

"But we'll surely see you when we get back East?"

"'Fraid not. Probably sail in a few days."

He wrenched himself free and dashed away.

The doctor stared gloomily after the baronet's disappearing form. There went all his hopes of seeing, of possibly acquiring, the Buckmaster diamond; for in spite of the most ingenious angling, he had never induced Sir Barton to grant even so much as a peep at that sparkling prize, or indeed at any of the collection of stones he admitted carrying around. All his hints, all his suggestions, all his stratagems to that end glanced ineffective from that glassy British obtuseness.

If only he had had some diamonds of his own to show, the result might have been different. He cursed the excess of caution which had led him into leaving all his collection at home. However, there was no help for it now. His chance was gone, and gone for good.

Without that interest to sustain and lure him on, the doctor soon found the trip beginning to pall upon him. By the time they reached St. Paul he was so heartily

sick of it that he loaded Ethel, Smiler, and himself upon a train and started for home.

IV

A DAY or two after his arrival in New York, Dr. Sprague, coming out of his bank, bumped squarely into Sir Barton just going into it.

"Well! Well!" He pounced upon the other with delighted recognition. "So you didn't get away, after all?"

The baronet recalled him with an effort.

"Oh, yes!" he drawled vaguely. "Yellowstone Park and all that. What say—goin' to remain in New York any time? No—I'm off to-night—sailin' at midnight on the Furantic. Couldn't book passage any earlier. Came down here to get my diamonds before goin' on board. Papers so full of hold-ups and that sort of thing, thought I'd better keep them in a vault while I was here."

"Very wise!" the doctor nodded. "The Buckmaster diamond is not a thing to take chances with. But listen!" He clung to Sir Barton as the latter began to edge away. "If you're not sailing until midnight, there's no necessity for you to go on board before evening. Why not get your diamonds and then come with me up to my house? I have a few good stones that I think you would be interested in seeing. We can look them over and have an early dinner. Ethel, I am sure, will be delighted to renew acquaintance."

There was no evading his grim insistence. Sir Barton's halting excuses were swept aside; and when he finally yielded a reluctant assent, no opportunity was given him to escape. The doctor accompanied him to the gate of the safe-deposit vault, and waited there until he reappeared with the small leather bag, the salvaging of which had served to bring them together.

The doctor seized one of its handles, so that it could be carried between them; and thus, feeling his captive safely tethered, led the way out to his car at the edge of the sidewalk.

Smiler, at the sight of his employer, flipped away a surreptitious cigarette. Then, as he saw what the doctor had in tow, he gave an incredulous stare and a low snort of disgust.

Good Lord! Had that piece of Stilton showed up again just when everything was riding easy, and it looked as if his hero and heroine were just about due for the final close-up in each other's arms? He jerked his cap down glumly over his forehead, and drove up the avenue with such utter disregard of the traffic rules that only his luck saved him from a summons.

"Really, old chap!" he heard Sir Barton falter to the doctor, as they paused at one of the crossings. "Awf'lly good of you, you know; but I've just happened to think it will be impossible to dine with you. Got one or two little things to attend to, and time's a bit of an object; so I'll just take a squint at your little rhinestones, what, and then be runnin' on. Maybe your man here'll be good enough to have a taxi waiting for me—say in twenty minutes?"

"Not at all!" protested the doctor. "If you really must go, I'll not seek to detain you; but there's no need to call a taxi. My car will be entirely at your service. Foster"—he leaned forward—"you may wait in front of the house, and then hold yourself at Sir Barton's orders for the rest of the afternoon."

Smiler mumbled something which passed for an assent. Inwardly, however, he was vowing that if he had to have that fish-faced foozle for a passenger, there was going to be a smash-up which would leave little of the car save toothpicks!

While he was still meditating how most adroitly to stage this catastrophe without injury to himself, they arrived before Dr. Sprague's old-fashioned brownstone residence on East Seventieth Street. The doctor and his guest, alighting, passed up the steps and into the office on the first floor.

Dr. Sprague turned to the attendant in the waiting-room.

"I shall be engaged for some little time," he said, "and am not to be disturbed on any account."

Then he ushered Sir Barton back into the consultation-room. The most prominent object here was a big steel safe, built into the wall and underlaid with a foundation of solid concrete from the floor of the cellar up—burglar-proof, practically impregnable to anything short of a first-class earthquake.

"I like to have my diamonds where I can enjoy them"—the doctor waved a hand toward the massive door of the safe—"and naturally one has to employ due precaution. Just wait a moment until I cut off the alarm system, and I will open up."

He operated a concealed switch in the wall at the right of the big safe, and then,

bending down, began to manipulate the combination.

"There is one particular stone I want to show you," he said as he twirled the nob; "a blue-white which, although smaller, is said to be a perfect match for the Buckmaster in texture and color. It will be interesting to place them side by side, eh, and see how they compare?"

Sir Barton made no answer. He was standing a few feet away, his hands in the pockets of his tweed coat, gazing over the doctor's head with that singularly vapid, uninterested expression which only an Englishman can achieve.

The combination clicked. The doctor swung open the heavy door and reached inside.

"Ah, here we are!"

He took from an inner drawer a folded tissue-paper packet about the size and shape of a Seidlitz powder, and straightened up again.

"Now, if you—" he started to say as he turned; but suddenly he froze to silence at the sight of the automatic which held him covered. "Why—why," he stammered, as he recovered his voice, "what's this—a joke?"

"Shut up!" Sir Barton—if that was his name—had dropped his lethargic pose. He was taut—tense as a bow-string. Those close-set eyes of his glinted like pin-points of steel. "Another squeak out of you, and I'll bore you through! Get up on that!" He indicated an operating-table. "Lie down!"

The doctor obeyed; there was nothing else to do. Sir Barton, never shifting his eye or his gun from the recumbent figure, opened his leather bag and produced—not the Buckmaster diamond, but a stout, serviceable coil of rope and a gag.

Let us pass lightly over the humiliation of the succeeding moments. Trussed tightly to the table, unable to move hand or foot, bereft even of the power to revile, Dr. Sprague was obliged to lie there helpless and see his safe rifled of its treasures.

A *Raffles* might have improved the opportunity by pointing out to the doctor the retributive justice of his plight. How often had he laid his cowed victims upon the operating-table and, fettering them with the bonds of anesthesia, abstracted various prized portions of their anatomy!

But the *métier* of Sir Barton was neither for epigram or moralizing. His talent, like the doctor's, lay in swift, expert workmanship. With a businesslike precision that overlooked nothing, he went through the various drawers and compartments of the safe, removing all the tissue-paper packets and stuffing them into his convenient leather bag. When he was satisfied that nothing remained behind, he closed the bag, assured himself that the doctor's gag and fastenings were secure, and then, slipping back into his aristocratic fog, he passed out of the room.

V

ONE may perhaps imagine the doctor's sick chagrin, his pent-up, choking fury as he watched this nonchalant departure.

With unhurried step Sir Barton crossed the waiting-room; then, thrusting his hand into his pocket, he halted abruptly.

"Ah!" He turned to the attendant. "I must have left my gloves in there. Would you mind getting them for me? No!" He stopped her. "Here they are, in the other pocket. Lucky, eh?" He laughed with apparent relief. "The old dear would probably have annihilated us. He has some writing to do, and told me he didn't want to be interrupted. Peppery old cock, isn't he? I'll say so!"

Smiling complacently at this idiomatic touch, Sir Barton drew on his gloves, nodded to the attendant—she was rather pretty in her nurse's uniform—and with his bag sauntered out by the door and down the steps to the waiting car.

"Grand Central Station," he directed Smiler, as he set his foot on the step.

Then he abruptly sprang back, his hand jerking to the pistol in his coat pocket.

But he was just a second too late. Catapulting out of the car came Dave Bullard, to land on him and bear him to the sidewalk. The leather bag flew out of his grasp and fell to one side. He struggled desperately to get at his automatic, but Bullard, sensing his purpose, had fastened a clutch upon that wrist which could not be shaken off. Over and over the two rolled on the sidewalk, Smiler dancing around them, eager to help, but unable to do so on account of their rapid gyrations.

As Sir Barton for a moment came on top, Smiler aimed a kick at him, but unfortunately it caught Bullard on the arm and caused him to relax his grip on his antagonist's wrist. Quick as a flash the latter reached for his gun and snatched it free;

but at the same instant Smiler kicked again, and this time he found his intended mark. The pistol ricochetted out of Sir Barton's grasp and slid scuttering over the edge of the curb to land under the automobile.

The odds, Sir Barton realized, were now plainly against him. Moreover, out of the tail of his eye he caught a glimpse of other figures hurrying to the scene—one of them in a blue uniform. Discretion is ever the better part of valor, which being interpreted means that a straight get-away beats three of a kind up the river.

With a final desperate effort he wrenched himself loose from Bullard, leaped to his feet, and was off down the street like a deer. Smiler gave chase; but being an indifferent runner, like most chauffeurs, he was hopelessly distanced before he reached the corner.

Through the swirling traffic of the avenue dived the fugitive. Beyond lay the low stone wall of Central Park. He gained it, vaulted over it, and disappeared in the bushes on the other side.

By this time the cop and the crowd had come up to Bullard, who, recognizing the futility of pursuit, had stopped and was dusting off his clothes.

"What's the idea?" the policeman demanded sternly.

A bird in the hand appealed to him more than a sprint through the thorny shrubbery in the park. The newspaperman turned back his lapel to show his fire badge.

"That was English Harry Halstead, or I miss my guess," he said, starting almost unconsciously to open Sir Barton's bag, which somebody had picked up and handed to him. Then, as he caught a glimpse of its contents, he closed the bag quickly and turned to the officer.

"I think," he interrupted himself sharply, "we'd better see what has happened to Dr. Sprague!"

VI

THAT evening, sitting at ease in the garage, Smiler held forth at length to a group of his associates.

"It was what Bullard calls the old Mohammed-and-the-mountain stuff," he explained. "This bimbo couldn't never have worked it in a thousand years if he'd gone after doc; but by dangling the bait of a diamond which he didn't have, and playing it with the reverse English, he made doc come after him. You may say doc's a boob; but the wisest of 'em 'll fall for that game. Miss Ethel, she claims she sized him for a crook right from the start, on account of his eyes, and was just leading him on to find out what he was up to. Well" —skeptically—"mebbe she did! It's all right, anyhow, so long as Bullard chooses to stand for it."

"And does this Bullard get her now all right?" sympathetically questioned a young chauffeur who was himself encountering parental opposition.

Smiler laughed.

"You tell him, parachute; you come down easy. Say," he inquired, "s'posin' you was doc, and some guy brings you back a bagful of diamonds that you'd lost, and at the same time has it in his power to smother a story that 'd make you a laughin'-stock from Maine to California, what would you do? I guess you'd say, 'Bless you, my children!' and never bat an eye. I'll say so!"

"But how does this Bullard happen to be on hand so pat?" asked another chauffeur, who had just come in and had not heard all the details.

"Why, don't you understand, as soon as I see doc and Sir Barton go in the house together, I naturally calls up Dave to tip him that the blighter's on deck again. Well, he says to wait for him, and he races up there in a taxi. You see, from the information I'd sent him from the West, he'd about figured out that there was something wrong about this guy.

"'I'll find out mighty soon,' he says. 'I'll stick myself in the car, and when he comes along I'll pretend I want to interview him. Then, if he shows up for a impostor, I'll advise him to make himself scarce.'

"Very good, Eddy! And if it hadn't been for the sparklers, it might have worked out that way; but Sir Barton wasn't looking for an interview—not with that bunch of rocks. He goes for his gun, and then of course there wasn't nothing for Dave but to mix it. Taking things by and large, though," Smiler summed up complacently, "it's just as Bullard says—I'm the one that really deserves the credit. For if I hadn't wised him up all along the line, where would doc's collection be to-night? And d'ye know what doc says? He says to Miss Ethel, he says:

"'My dear, the motto of our home must always be—ask Mr. Foster!'"

Angelica*

THE ROMANCE OF A GIRL WHO WANTED TO GET SOMETHING OUT OF LIFE

By Elisabeth Sanxay Holding

XVIII

BUT Angelica herself! That *she* should be undergoing this horror, this nightmare, this incredible thing she had heard of and read of!

"Oh, mommer!" she cried. "Oh, *mommer!* It's the worst thing I ever heard of! I'm the worst—"

"Hush, deary! Don't talk so wild. It's bad, I must admit, but you're young, and I dare say you loved the man and trusted in him, to your sorrow."

Angelica turned her face to the wall. That was the very worst of it. She hadn't really trusted Vincent at all. She had simply followed an instinct of which she understood nothing. She had been dazzled by his words, been deluded through compassion, through recklessness, through desire, into throwing herself away upon a man who cared nothing for her, who had no affection, no human kindness. He didn't care what happened to her. If she had been willing to stay with him a little longer, he would have been willing to "love" her a little longer; but when she had decided to leave him, he offered no resistance. He would quite easily forget her, she knew.

Useless to tell herself that the conventional code of morality meant nothing to her. It did! She had fancied herself superior to all that, but that was because she hadn't known or imagined what such a surrender meant. Just to run into his arms, without ceremony, without any promise, any covenant, without regard for any other human creature, reckless of her own future, flinging away her pride, her freedom, her decency. That wasn't beautiful. That wasn't love. What in God's name was it?

She had not even happy memories. It was shame to remember her past joy. She loathed herself for her past ecstasy. A perfect terror of her own infamy swept over her.

"No!" she cried. "I can't stand it! Mommer, it's too awful! You don't know how awful! You don't know what I did!"

"Why don't you tell me, deary?"

"I can't! I don't know how. I'll try." She sat up in bed and caught her mother's hand. "The worst is the way I treated Eddie. He was so good to me! He asked me to marry him, and I said I would; and then, the very day he left, I went away—with his own brother!"

"Oh, Angie!" cried her mother, in horror.

"Oh, mommer, if you knew Eddie, you'd see what an awful thing I've done! He's such a *good* man, and so—kind of noble, and all that! I don't know how he'll ever stand it. He trusted me."

"But what ever made you do such a thing, Angelica? Are you so terrible fond of this other one?"

"No — not now. No — that's what I can't explain. I don't know why I did. I —I just seemed to forget everything. I—just thought—I loved him."

"And you don't? You love the other one—the good one?"

Angelica began to weep.

"No," she said. "That's the worst. I don't love either of 'em. What's the matter with me, do you suppose? I don't seem to have any heart!" She struggled painfully to get her thought into words. "I hate Vincent, and I like Eddie, a lot; but love—I've never felt it at all, mommer, for any one," she sobbed. "Not that love they have in books. It makes me feel dreadful. If I loved Vincent, I wouldn't

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feel so mean and low and bad. It would be—sort of splendid; but this! Mommer!"

"Well, deary?"

"Maybe there's no such a thing."

"No such a thing as what?"

"As love."

Mrs. Kennedy had never experienced it; had never seen or heard of any authentic case of this beautiful tenderness, this undying devotion, this heavenly thing. Yet she firmly believed that it existed — this love which was not desire, not infatuation, not madness, not sentimentality, not friendship—this ecstasy which endured forever. Not experience, not common sense, nothing at all could have convinced her, for it was instinct that made her believe — nature's most cruel and most necessary deception. For life to continue, it is necessary that women shall cling to two lies—that men are capable of truly loving them, and that their children will love them in their old age. Upon these two delusions civilization rests.

"Deary," said Mrs. Kennedy, "I think you'd better write to him and tell him, and see what he will do for you. Perhaps he'll marry you."

"He is married," said Angelica indifferently. "Yes, mommer, I will write to him; but it's an even chance if he'll come or not. He's queer. You can't ever tell, with him. I'll try, anyway, and see if I can't get some money out of him."

To her mother the tragedy was somewhat lessened by the fact that Angelica didn't love Vincent. She fancied that the girl would consequently get over it better, not suffer so cruelly; but for Angelica there lay the worst of it, the most intolerable part to bear. It was that that made her frantic with shame and remorse. She looked in vain; she could find no trace of magnificence in her downfall. It wasn't a splendid sin, done for reckless love. It was a damnable folly, committed through reckless ignorance.

She wrote to Vincent with a sort of native art. She wished to hide the least sign of anxiety or reproach; she wished him merely to think that she missed him.

Why don't you come? I have been looking for you for ever so long. Come in some evening soon. ANGELICA.

The evening after the letter was mailed, she got up and dressed herself, trembling with weakness, hardly able to stand, but quite self-possessed. She didn't feel the slightest emotion at the prospect of seeing Vincent again—nothing but a dogged resolution to make him give her money.

She attempted no attitude, made no plan of what she would say to him, because she knew now how helpless she was in his hands. *He* would direct the interview; *he* would give the key-note; it would all depend upon his mood. She couldn't influence him. She didn't even take pains with her appearance, for she knew that it didn't lie with her to move him. It depended upon the condition of his own mysterious soul.

She had hardly expected him so soon. He came that same evening, but, from the very sound of his footstep as he followed her along the hall to the tiny parlor, she could feel that he was sullen and reluctant, and her heart sank.

"Oh, if only I didn't have to bother with him!" she thought. "If only I didn't have to see him ever again! And I've got to be nice to him and ask him for money!"

They entered the parlor, and sat down in silence.

"Angelica!" he said abruptly, with a frown. "Why did you leave me?"

"I wanted to—"

"I was amazed. I was *shocked*. You behaved—" He hesitated for a moment, then went on severely: "You behaved like a light woman. I thought you were faithful and constant and sincere; and then, after *one week*—"

"But what kind of a week was it?" cried Angelica.

"I'm not a rich man, but I did the best I could for you."

"You know what I mean! In that awful little road-house, with you shutting yourself up in the bedroom all the time and leaving me there alone for all those men to laugh at!"

"I had to write."

"You hadn't any business to write. You might have thought a little bit how I'd feel. If you couldn't pay any attention to me, you shouldn't—"

"Did you bring me here to reproach me?" he demanded. "Because if you did, I've had enough."

"No, I didn't mean to scold you," she answered hurriedly, recalled to the necessity for placating him. "No—I just wanted to see you."

Her face, which had become so pinched, so colorless, was covered with a vivid flush. The conciliatory words almost stuck in her throat; but apparently Vincent didn't observe her trouble.

"I'm not disposed to endure much more from you—upon my word, I'm not!" he went on. "The way you went off, simply leaving me a note to say that you thought you'd go home—making a fool of me! I was naive enough to imagine we were to spend our lives together. I thought we'd stay for a month or so in that beautiful little mountain inn, fishing, tramping, reading, talking—"

"You hardly spoke to me all day long. I had to sit down-stairs in the dining-room with those fishermen."

"How was I to know that you had no resources? Besides, it was rainy, and we couldn't have gone out, anyway; but the very day you left, the weather cleared. I was really disgusted with you, Angelica. You behaved abominably!"

"Well, Vincent," she said, "you'll have to excuse that, and be a good friend to me, because I need some money."

He jumped to his feet.

"You're shameless!" he said. "I'm shocked!"

"No—listen! There's going to be a baby!" she cried, in desperation.

He was a little taken aback for a moment. He gave a hasty glance at her poor desperate young face, and then looked away.

"There!" he said, taking a leather wallet out of his pocket and throwing it on the table. "Take it! It's all I've got. My God, you can't get the better of a woman! They have it all their own way in this world. They make us pay, and pay dear, for their follies!"

Angelica stared at him, astounded.

"*I'm* supposed to be the guilty one," he went on. "*I'm* the one who's held responsible — why, the good Lord only knows. *I'm* the one to pay!"

"As for *me*," said Angelica, "it's just a picnic, isn't it?"

"You're fulfilling your natural destiny —at my expense."

"Oh!" she cried. "I wish to God I could throw the money back in your face, Vincent!"

"But you won't. And now that you've got all that you can out of me, I suppose I can go?"

But Angelica was weak; she couldn't endure it.

"Do you mean that you're not even sorry?" she cried. "Can't you think what this means to me—what's going to become of me? Oh, Vincent, just *think* what's before me!"

"Just what always was before you. You're bad, my girl, through and through. You couldn't have ended any other way. No decency, no self-restraint. I don't suppose I was the first man—"

"Oh, don't!" she cried. "Don't! You can't realize—oh, Vincent!"

"And as for *this*, it isn't the first time such a thing has happened in the world. Even a young girl brought up in sheltered luxury, like you, must have heard of such things. In fact, my dear, you must have known quite as well as I what the consequences of our adventure might be. If you say you didn't, you're lying."

She put out one hand in a sort of mute and feeble protest.

"But I didn't think—you'd change—" Her voice faltered; she found it almost impossible to go on. "I thought—that you —felt like I did."

"So I did," he answered. "So I do—just the same as you. Our impulses, our reasons for going off together, were exactly the same, only I'm honest about it and you're not. You pretend to be heart-broken because I don't care for you any longer, when, as a matter of fact, you don't care a bit more for me. You're an utter hypocrite!"

She was confused and crushed by his words. He was taking away from her her very last support—her conviction that she had been misled, wronged, sinned against. Somehow he was putting her in the wrong. She couldn't deny that she had gone away with him of her own free will; and yet she knew that it *hadn't* been her own free will. She didn't deny her own guilt, but she knew that his was far greater.

"I'm not a hypocrite," she said.

"Then you're a fool. No—we've done with each other, Angelica. It's over for both of us."

"But it isn't over for me!" she cried. Her heart was flaming with resentment against the hellish injustice of it—that she should have all the suffering, all the punishment. "Just *think* of it!" she cried. "Can't you realize, Vincent, how dreadful it is for me?"

"No, I can't realize. I'm not a woman, and I don't pretend to understand them and their fine feelings. I can't understand or sympathize with this cowardly whining over physical effects which are known to every one. Did you want anything else from me, except money, Angelica?"

"Yes, I do!" she answered. "I do want something else, and I'll get it, too. I want to make you suffer, and I will, too!"

"Oh, I see—the wronged woman with the baby in her arms! Well, Angelica, go ahead! Do your worst. I don't think you can hurt me very much."

He looked down at her with a gay, mocking smile, he put on his hat, and was gone.

Angelica went back to her mother with the wallet.

"Well!" she began. "Here's—" But she broke down and began to cry wildly.

"Oh, mommer! Mommer! I can't bear this! I *can't* be treated like this! Oh, mommer, not *me!* Not *me!* It can't be true!"

Her mother was glad when she wept. She stroked Angelica's head in silence, pleased to see her softened, even humbled, happy to see that ferocious hardness gone; not suspecting that that ferocity and that hardness were the very best of Angelica, the very spirit of her. When she wept like this, she was submerged, perishing, *going under.* With a frightful effort she saved herself and rose above these bitter waters.

"He'll *pay,* all right!" she said, looking up with an odd, horrible grin. "You watch!"

"Don't talk so, my deary!"

"Here—take it! Let's see how much we've got to go on with," she interrupted, pushing the wallet across the table. "He's always saying he hasn't got a cent, but I notice he always finds plenty for anything he wants. God knows where he gets it, but he does."

Her mother counted what was in the purse, and turned to Angelica with a look of amazement.

"Why, Angie! There's only four dollars here!"

Angelica laughed.

"It's all we'll get, anyway, mommer," she said. "It 'll have to do."

XIX

Behold Mrs. Kennedy answering an advertisement for a janitress, far over on the lower West Side, in the Chelsea district.

"I have the best of references," she told Mr. Steinberg, the landlord. "I've been where I am now for twelve years, and no complaints."

"Den vy do you leaf?"

"I don't like living 'way up there," she answered calmly. "I've got more friends down around here. And my married daughter's coming to live with me, and she'd rather be down here. She's real lonely, now her husband's gone to the war."

This was her ruse to preserve that respectability which no one valued or even observed.

She got the place, because of her decency and her references. There was nothing to be said against her in any quarter. What is more, Mr. Steinberg felt from the look of her that she was a hard worker. Like her other place, it was a "cold water" flat; there was a man to look after the furnace, but everything else was to be done by her, for her rent and an incredibly small stipend. She agreed. Her sole asset was her readiness to undertake hard and unremitting labor. There was not a thing which she could do better than the average woman, so that her boast, her credit, must be that she did *more.*

"My married daughter's thinking of taking in sewing," she said. "Maybe you could put a little work in her way."

"We'll see," said Mr. Steinberg, "later on, maybe."

Now that she had secured a refuge, where Angelica might assume respectability among complete strangers, the poor woman's next preoccupation was to find some way of having her pitiful furniture moved. She went about for days, trying to drive bargains with any one who possessed a cart; but war-time prices and conditions prevailed, and no one cared to accept so unprofitable a task.

In the end she found an Italian who sold ice, coal, and wood in a near-by cellar, and who agreed to do what she wished. She paid him at least six visits, trying to persuade him to take less money, or to promise great care with her scanty belongings, or to reassure herself that he really understood the new address. In order to pay him and to settle her few little bills, she was obliged to sell her parlor furniture, blue lamp and all.

Winter was beginning to set in when they moved. It was a raw and bitter day, blankly gray overhead. Mrs. Kennedy

lingered in the old flat where she had lived for twelve years, watching the Italian carry out her things, her heart sick with shame to be leaving the place in this fashion, her parlor furniture sold, her daughter "in trouble." There was nothing left now but the barest essentials—things to sleep on, to be covered with, to cook with, and a chair or two.

Angelica had gone by surface-car to the new home, to await the arrival of the cart. For the moment each of them was alone in a dismal bare flat, hopelessly similar. It was a day of gloom. The removal had brought home to them most forcibly their desperate position, their helplessness, their desolation. They had only each other—no other friend, no other resource.

They set to work at once, in the dusk, to arrange their furniture; and when a barren sort of order had been achieved, Mrs. Kennedy went out in search of the usual little shop where she might buy a bite for Angelica's supper. She tried her best to be calm, resolute, strong; but her heart was like lead as she hurried through the unfamiliar streets, chilled by a cold wind from the river, and by a far colder and bleaker apprehension.

She caught sight of a brightly lighted little grocery-store, and she went in. Another pang! Here she was no one; simply a poorly dressed stranger with a paltry handful of change. She remembered her own cheerful young grocer with positive anguish. It was almost the last straw.

She came back, half running, with her little bag under her arm, entered the strange doorway, rang the strange bell. Her daughter admitted her.

"I didn't do much," Angelica said. "I started to scrub the shelves, but I felt tired. Anyway, what does it matter?"

She had been sitting in a dreadful apathy in the forlorn kitchen; she sank down again on the old step-ladder chair.

"If only I had a bit of linoleum for the floor!" began Mrs. Kennedy, looking down at the filthy boards. "A nice check pattern, like Mrs. Stone had—"

Angelica stopped her.

"I prayed," she said.

"Oh, my deary! I'm so glad. God 'll hear you and—"

"I prayed it would die."

"*Angie!*"

"You didn't think I wanted it, did you?"

"You'll feel different when it's here."

"I sha'n't. Lots of people don't. It's a curse to me, a *curse!* A baby—me with a living to earn the rest of my life! No—I'll hate it. I do now. I'd have to hate any child with *his* blood in it. I hope it 'll die!"

"That's a wicked, wicked thing to say, Angie."

"Maybe you'd be surprised to know how wicked I feel. My Gawd, what I've done! The chance I've thrown away!"

"That's not like you, my deary."

"*I'm* not like me—not like the me I thought I was. I thought I was—oh, I don't know—kind of a wonder; and after all, I'm nothing but—this. Going to have a baby—pretending to be married—not a cent! It's a grand end, all right!"

"End, Angie?"

"Yes, end. I'm done—finished!"

Not her suffering, though. That had just begun. All that winter and through the spring she lived in a misery without relief or solace. She could think of nothing in all the universe but her own torment. She was ashamed to go out, in spite of her mother's account of her as a married daughter with a husband gone to war, in spite of the wedding-ring the poor embarrassed woman had bought for her at the ten-cent store. She felt that she had in no way the appearance of a young wife. She felt herself to be obviously and flagrantly an outcast.

She was ill, too, and so hopeless, so profoundly dejected, that she saw no sense in getting up. She lay on her cot in the bedroom, dark as the former one, day after day. Now and then a bit of sewing was brought to her to do, and then she would drag herself into the kitchen and sit by the window, where there was a little more light, until the work was done. Otherwise she simply lay there, her black hair uncombed, an old shawl about her shoulders, in fathomless despair.

Life was too ghastly to contemplate. She could see nothing before her worth living for. Vincent was gone, and with him love and youth; Eddie was gone, and with him security and hope. Whether the baby lived or died, she was disgraced. She could never, never forget that she had been cast aside.

They were bitterly poor, and seldom had enough to eat. There was nothing to re-

lieve their monotonous pain and anxiety; not a neighbor to exchange a word with, not a bit of gossip to amuse them—nothing, nothing, nothing, from morning till night but their own sad faces, their own listless voices, their own leaden hearts, their own undying apprehension.

"It 'll all seem different, deary, when you're well again," Mrs. Kennedy told her child. "Then you'll go to work again, and we won't be so pinched. You'll go back to the factory and see your friends, and go out, like you used to, to the movies, and dances."

"I won't. There'll be a child to look after and feed. Just to work in a factory till I'm too old, and then—I don't know—die in the poorhouse, I guess!"

"There's lots of things might happen, Angie. Maybe you'll marry. There's men that would be willing to overlook—"

"Well, I don't want 'em. I'm through with men."

"Then maybe you'll get on fine in some kind of business."

"No chance of that! I haven't any education. I'm too ignorant. Don't try to make up things to comfort me; I know how it 'll be."

But still she didn't, she couldn't, want to die. No matter how terrible her future looked, her strong spirit clung to life, even the most repulsive life. It wasn't that she feared death, but she resented it. It was the complete defeat, the final outrage.

As her time drew near, she began greatly to dread dying. She would lie by the hour, thinking of death, in a sort of silent fury.

At last it came upon her, one July morning, that most shocking and insensate of all nature's cruelties. Her mother sat by her in fatalistic patience, knowing well that there was no escape, no alleviation. There was a doctor whom Mrs. Kennedy had summoned—not the noble and kindly physician of Angelica's romance, but an indifferent and callous one accustomed to the poor and their profitless agonies. He was very cheerful. He was able to look down upon that young face distorted in brutal anguish, and smile.

"Nothing to be done now," he said. "I'll look in again in an hour or so."

He returned too late. The protesting little spirit had entered the world without him, and lay crying, wrapped in an old flannel night-dress, in Mrs. Kennedy's lap, while the young mother watched it with unfathomable eyes.

XX

ANGELICA sat at the kitchen table, her blouse torn rudely open at the neck, wet through with perspiration, haggard and worn almost beyond recognition.

"My Gawd!" she said, pushing back her hair. "It's hot as hell, mommer!"

Mrs. Kennedy sighed, without speaking or interrupting her work. She was standing at the ironing-board, finishing a big week's washing. It was a night of intolerable and sultry heat, and the kitchen, with the stove lighted for the irons, and the gas blazing for light, was a place of torment. The two women were curiously pallid, curiously alert, with the terrible activity of exhaustion. They had reached so high a point of suffering, both physical and mental, on that night, that they were no longer aware of their pain.

"Listen, mommer!" said Angelica. "Here's what I've written."

She picked up the sheet of soft paper with blue lines, on which the ink blurred and the pen dug and scratched, and on which she had written:

VINCENT:

The baby has been sick all the time, and now he is worse. You got to send some money for him. You got to find it somewhere if you have not got it. He is in a terrible bad state. He only weighs six pounds, and he is going on for six weeks. ANGELICA.

She read it in her hoarse, thrilling voice, and it sounded so vehement, so passionate, so touching, that they both believed the letter to be so in itself.

"Now I'll run out and mail it," she said.

Just as she was, with disheveled hair and unfastened blouse, she hurried out into the street. A man spoke to her, and she swore at him.

She was back within a few minutes, panting, but her mother was no longer in the kitchen; she had gone into the dark bedroom to quiet the poor little baby.

"I'll hold him, Angie," she said. "You can go on ironing."

But Angelica flung herself on her knees before the child on her mother's lap.

"Gawd! Little feller! Little love! Gawd, I wish he'd die and be out of this!"

Her mother could not rebuke her. Worn out by unending worry, by lack of sleep, by the heat, by intolerable toil for the tiny

thing, she, too, could only wish it dead. It suffered so; it was so weak, so pitiful.

Night after night they had held it in their arms, close to the window, where it might get what air there was. They sang to it, rocked it, bathed its wasted little body to cool it, and all the while it wailed in its feeble voice—a weak, monotonous, heart-rending sound. They tended it by day and by night. From time to time it slept, but fitfully, the beating of its little heart shaking its emaciated body.

Angelica would sit beside it, her eyes fixed upon it, scarcely daring to breathe in her terror that it might die as it slept; for though she said and she meant that she wished it to die and be free of its misery, for her own sake she longed for it to live to the utmost limit, no matter if every day and every night were a pain to her, and her whole life went by in its service. She wanted to be holding it in her arms every waking hour; she could not sleep unless it lay within the reach of her hand. Even if she went to the corner on an errand for her mother, she was filled with panic until she had got back to it, and had seen it and touched it again.

She cared for nothing else whatever. She didn't trouble to dress herself decently; she no longer helped her mother about the flat. Barefooted, her heavy hair pinned in a great slovenly coil, her blouse unfastened, with a ragged skirt hanging about her lean hips, she would sit for hours with the little wailing thing in her arms, pressed against her bosom, while she sang to it in her hoarse, touching voice.

She learned all she could from the doctor and the visiting nurse, and did just as they had told her. She bathed the child, fed it, tended it, in the most careful and professional way; but she would not let it alone. The doctor told her to leave it in the clothes-basket which was its bed, and the nurse assured her it would be cooler and more comfortable there; but she could not restrain herself from snatching it up. She could not help feeling that the passion of her love, the generous warmth of her body, must invigorate and vitalize it. Most cruel of all delusions—that love can save!

"He's got to get into the country," said Angelica. "That's all there is to it. I'd send him to one of these fresh-air places, only I know he'd die without me. He's got to have me. No one else would know his ways."

"Well, if Mr. Geraldine sends—"

"If! If! If he don't, I'll— He's got to, that's all. I'll give him just one day more, and then—"

"Maybe he's not there. Maybe he's gone to the war."

"Not a chance! Well, if he's not there, I'll have to find him, and I will."

There was no letter the next day.

"You got to telephone," said Angelica to her mother, "and find out if he still lives there at Buena Vista. If he does, I'll write once more."

Her mother came in late that afternoon.

"He's there," she said. "Somebody—one of the servants, I dare say—came to the telephone, and I just said, 'Is Mr. Vincent Geraldine there?' And she said, 'Who is it wants to speak to him?' And I said, 'I only wanted to know was he at home.' 'Oh, yes!' she says. 'He's at home!'"

Poor woman, lugging her eternal bucket! She looked as if she were being pressed down by giant hands which were forcing her exhausted and gallant body to its knees. There was nothing ready for her now, at the end of her bitter day—nothing in the house which she could cook for supper. Her bed was still unmade, there wasn't even a decent place for her to sit down, for Angelica occupied the only rocking-chair, drawn up close to the window, where the baby could get what air there was.

Mrs. Kennedy looked at them, and for an instant she hated them both—Angelica who so savagely demanded this unceasing, inhuman toil of her, who took everything and gave nothing, not so much as a loving word, and this wailing, wretched little creature who didn't even know her.

"It's *too much!*" she thought. "I'm getting old."

"Take the baby," said Angelica, "while I write another letter."

"I'll get some supper first."

"No! I've got to write now."

"Then put the kettle on, so's we can have a cup of tea before long," said her mother, and sat down with the wretched, hot little baby in her arms.

VINCENT:

This child is going to die. You got to help it. If you do not send me some money for him right away, I will go out after you and get it. I don't care if you are hard up. You can get it somewhere, and you got to. This child will die if you don't. ANGELICA.

"Deary," said her mother, "I don't think it's any good."

"It is!" Angelica assured her. "He's got to pay!"

An answer came quickly enough. Angelica smiled grimly as she saw the envelope. She and her mother were sitting together over their supper of tinned pork and beans, Mrs. Kennedy eating with one hand while she held the fitfully sleeping baby.

"Now we'll see," said Angelica. "It's always a guess with that feller. You never know what he'll say."

Vincent wrote thus:

ANGELICA:

I would if I could. I am not altogether a brute, a monster. I am not callous to the sufferings of my own child; but I have absolutely nothing. Ever since I had your first letter I have been thinking, trying my utmost to discover some way to help you.

And the only way I can do so is to appeal to Eddie, to tell him the whole story, and to throw ourselves on his mercy. It will be a bitter blow to him, and it is a terrible penance for me to tell him; but, for your sake, I must bear the pain of telling and he of hearing. He will help us, Angelica. He is a generous and noble soul. He has never yet failed me.

She remained stupefied.

"D'ye mean Eddie doesn't know?" she cried, addressing an invisible Vincent.

It was such an amazing idea to her. She had always imagined Eddie as possessed of all the details. She had often thought of him, sitting in his trench in the moonlight, reflecting with grief and bitterness over her infamy. She had looked upon him as utterly lost, beyond her reach. She had believed, as a matter of course, that all those people knew, and despised and hated her—Polly, Mrs. Russell, all the servants.

"Why, mommer!" she cried. "He—"

"Whatever is it, child?" asked Mrs. Kennedy, surprised at the strange look on her daughter's face. Angelica had risen slowly to her feet, and was staring at her mother. A new, a terrible hope was dawning upon her.

"Quick, mommer!" she cried suddenly. "I got to stop him!"

She rushed into the bedroom, put on a hat over her disordered hair, pinned together the open bosom of her blouse, and ran down the hall.

"Angie! Angie!" cried her mother. "Where are you going?"

The door banged. She was gone.

Mrs. Kennedy laid the baby on the bed.

"Cry, if you must," she said. "I can't hold you any more till I've had a cup of tea."

Angelica had gone running up the street to a drug-store on Sixth Avenue, where she knew there was a telephone booth. It was a place of doubtful repute. There was always a group there of young Italian-Americans, flashily dressed youths of immense assurance, who were interested in every woman that entered the store; but they didn't care for Angelica in her slatternly dress, with her fierce and haggard face.

One of them made a coarse jest about her, which she answered with an oath; then she went into the booth and pulled the door to behind her. Her heart was beating frantically; she was scarcely able to speak, her hoarse voice came out with an unfamiliar sound.

"I want to speak to Mr. Vincent!" she said.

"Who is it?"

"Call him quick! It's a message from his brother." A silly ruse, but she was capable of nothing better. Then, after a long pause, she heard his voice.

"What is it?"

"It's me—Angelica. Vincent, don't you *dare* to write to Eddie! Don't you dare ever to let him know!"

"My dear child, I've already done so. I've just put the letter in the box, not ten minutes ago."

"No!" she cried. "No! You must get it back!"

He laughed.

"When once a letter is posted—"

She gave a sort of wail. He was still speaking, but she didn't care what he said. She hung up the receiver and went out into the street again. Somehow this seemed to her the very worst blow that had fallen on her, the greatest cruelty of her destiny. To have got, in the blackness of her despair, this glorious hope, and to have it destroyed almost before it had breathed!

It occurred to her that there was one more desperate chance. She went hurrying home again.

"Mommer!" she said. "Where's your money?"

"I haven't any money, Angie, as well you know."

"You have!"

"Only just the bit that's to last us through the week."

"Give it to me, quick!"

She snatched up the flat little purse and rushed out again, pushing her hair up under her hat as she ran. She didn't quite know where to look. She sought in vain along Sixth Avenue, then crossed to Fifth, and found there what she wanted—an empty taxicab, cruising along Madison Square.

"Say!" she called. "Taxi!"

The man stopped and looked at her suspiciously. A queer-looking thing she was to hail a cab!

"I want to go out to Baycliff," she said.

"You better walk, then," he said. "It's cheaper."

"Oh, you'll get paid, all right!" said Angelica. "The people out there'll pay you good and give you a tip."

He shook his head.

"I guess not," he said doubtfully. "You better find some one else. I'm married. I can't afford to take no chances. Where'd I be, if I wasn't to get paid? A long run like that, and got to come back empty!"

Angelica recalled something which had been mentioned in one of Mrs. Russell's long stories.

"Look here!" she said. "It's the law. You got to take passengers."

"Not outside the city limits I haven't," said the man.

They were both a little uneasy, as neither of them felt at all sure as to what laws there might or might not be; but Angelica in her desperation was resourceful.

"You let me in," she said, "and I'll fix it up with the people out there. See, I'll give you two dollars now, but I won't tell them I gave you anything, and they'll pay you and give you a tip, too. I'm the waitress out there, and they'll be darned glad to see me back. You didn't ought to worry. You'd ought to know I wouldn't risk getting locked up just for the sake of a ride. No one would take a chance like that."

"Well, they do, all the same," said the driver. "It wouldn't do me no good to get you locked up—not if you didn't have no money."

"It's only people out on a joy ride that do that," said she. "Where'd be the sense in me doing that—taking a ride all alone and then getting locked up?"

He wavered, and she hurriedly got out the two dollars—earned by long hours of scrubbing by Mrs. Kennedy—and gave them to the chauffeur. He was now practically won; her insistence overcame his weak will, her two dollars charmed him. Moreover, he liked her, she was so frank and so much in earnest.

"All right," he said. "Get in! Now mind you treat me fair—I'm taking a big risk for you!"

She was a strange enough figure, sitting there in her dusty clothes, her battered old hat, while the cab sped on, through and out of the city, along dark country roads lined with trees, past fields, past marshes, past desolate buildings, past friendly lighted houses. She was consumed with a fever of haste, burning with anxiety, looking over the driver's shoulders at the road before her, which seemed so endless.

Now they were going up the hill to the house—the very house.

"You wait a while," she said. "The longer you wait the more you'll get paid."

The front door stood open, with only a screen door across the aperture, and a faint light from the hall shone out on the roadway. There didn't seem to be any one about. She stood outside, peering through the screen into the hall, listening. Not a sound!

She was obliged to ring the bell; and who should open the door but the doctor? He didn't see who it was until he had let her in; then he was frightened at the unexpectedness of her coming, at the wild disorder of her appearance.

"What do you want?" he asked.

"I want to speak to Vincent," she answered. "Where is he?"

"He may be busy. I'd better—"

"*Where is he?*" she demanded.

When the doctor didn't answer, she pushed by him and ran up-stairs.

Vincent was lying back in an armchair, in a bath-robe, his slender bare feet on a second chair. He was eating biscuits and cheese from a plate balanced on his knees, and reading a magazine, in the greatest possible comfort, physical and mental, when without an instant's warning Angelica entered, wild, savage, relentless as a Fury.

He sat up, drawing the bath-robe tightly about him, and tried to frown at her; but he felt, and he appeared, at a horrible disadvantage.

"What do you want?" he demanded.

She couldn't speak for a moment. She only looked at him with her fierce black

eyes, pressing a hand against her breast, as if to stifle by force the tumult there. He was alarmed, really, although he tried so desperately to look scornful.

"Well?" he asked again. "What did you come here for?"

"That letter!" she said. "That letter to Eddie! You sha'n't send it!"

"I have," he answered.

"No!" she cried. "No! You haven't."

"I tell you I have!" he answered defiantly. "I told you so over the telephone."

She stood motionless, staring past him, oblivious of his uneasy bewilderment. Thoughts were running through her brain like fire through parched grass. She remembered things she had heard—of the English suffragettes pouring acid into mail-boxes to destroy their contents. But what did they use, and where to get it?

Her vigorous and subtle brain was never quite without resource. She thought and thought, with passionate intensity, and at last, suddenly, an idea came to her. She went out of the room abruptly, so swiftly and silently that Vincent was astonished and more than ever alarmed. What in Heaven's name was that damnable girl up to now? He knew she wouldn't stop at anything.

He went on tiptoe to the door and peered cautiously out into the hall. She wasn't there. Where was she? He was certain that she hadn't given up and gone away. She was after that letter, and she wouldn't go without it.

"She's ill, though," he muttered. "Beastly — savage! Forcing her way in like this! My God, I'll *never* be rid of her! What the devil was the matter with me, to get mixed up with a girl like that? I wish she'd break her neck. I wish I had the courage to wring it!"

He stopped suddenly and turned pale; for there on the mantelpiece, before his eyes, was the letter. Courtland had forgotten to mail it!

He flew at it and tore it into bits, like a criminal concealing some trace of his guilt. He was actually capable of imagining that, by this, he had got the better of Angelica.

Angelica ran down-stairs to the kitchen, which was deserted, but quite brightly lighted. There, on the back of the coal range, stood what she had expected to see —the teakettle, gently steaming.

She lifted it, and went to the back door. There was a couple—probably Annie and her young man—sitting in the dark on the steps. She turned back, went through the laundry and out of a side door; down the hill, through the grass, where she wouldn't make a sound. Once she stumbled, and a few drops of scalding water spilled upon her instep. She smothered a shriek of pain, and hurried on.

There wasn't a soul in sight; the road was quite empty even of passing motors. She crossed to the other side, where the post-box stood, and, raising herself on tiptoe, she poured into it the entire contents of the kettle.

Then she ran into the woods behind the box, and hid the kettle in a clump of thick bushes. She was satisfied that the letter must be destroyed, together with anything else the box may have contained. Her conscience did not reproach her in the least for this possible injury to others.

"There couldn't be any one," she reflected, "who could want any one else to get a letter as much as I *don't* want Eddie to get that one!"

She rang the front door-bell again, but this time the doctor didn't let her in. He looked at her through the screen door and shook his head.

"No!" he said softly. "Better go away. Don't make any disturbance, for your own sake."

"I only want to speak to Vincent," she said plaintively.

"Better not. Go away now. Nobody's seen you. Vincent and I are alone in the house. I'll never mention it. I'm your friend, you know; and you must be my friend if I need one, won't you?"

He had heard rumors, which he didn't quite believe, that Eddie was to marry this remarkable young woman. He knew that Eddie was capable of extraordinarily quixotic deeds, and he thought it just as well to have a friend at court, in case— Moreover, he liked Angelica, and was well disposed toward her. The rebuffs he had received, rude as they had been, hadn't either hurt or discouraged him. The Lord who had made him so vulnerable to the charms of the fair sex had likewise provided him with a sort of protective armor.

"Of course I'll be your friend," said Angelica; "but I just must speak to Vincent."

"I thought you had seen him," said the doctor. "You went up-stairs."

"I forgot to tell him something very important. If you don't want me to come, just make him come down here—please!"

She knew how to be meek enough to serve her ends.

"Please!" she said again, with all her cajolery. "Please, doctor! Just get him to come down and speak to me through the door—just for an instant!"

He hesitated.

"I want to do anything I can for you—"

"And wouldn't you please just pay that cab?" she said. "I'm afraid he'll wait till you do."

He had a little money on hand, as it happened, and he was proud to be able to play so gallant a rôle.

"With pleasure!" he said. "But then won't you agree to postpone your talk with Vincent?"

"I can't!" she cried piteously. "Oh, do please get him down!"

"Very well," he said, with a sigh and a smile.

She waited patiently, close to the screen. Everything was quiet. The waiting chauffeur had shut off his engine and sat on the step of his cab, smoking. Far away, from some other house, came the thumping rhythm of a piano-player, and quite close to her the busy chirping of little nocturnal insects.

Before very long, Vincent's heavy tread sounded on the stairs. His big body loomed up in the dim light of the hall, and drew near to her; but he did not unlock the door. She suppressed a smile. He was afraid of her—that big, masterful poet, forever proclaiming himself a *man!*

"Well!" he demanded sternly of the girl outside.

"I spoiled your letter," she said. "Eddie 'll never get it."

"What? I'll write another—"

"You'd better not do that, Vincent. He wouldn't be pleased with the way you've acted."

"Perhaps not; but it's my duty—"

"Don't any of them know? Not your mother or any one?"

"Of course not. I'm not the sort to tell such a thing. If it wasn't my duty now, I wouldn't."

"I thought it was to get money to help me out."

"Well—yes, partly; but he really ought to know, in case he still thinks of marrying you"

"No," she said quietly. "He mustn't know. Look here, Vincent! I've done this one bad thing in my life. I never did anything bad before, and I never will again; but if it was known, I'd never be forgiven. I'd never get another chance—from any one; and I mean to have another chance. It's never going to be known. I'm not going to be ruined and wasted, just for one—badness. It's going to be wiped out, I tell you!"

"It will never be wiped out. You'll never forget, Angelica—you'll never, never forget me. You can't love again. You've lost heaven, my girl."

She was still for a moment.

"Maybe I have," she said. "Maybe I have lost heaven. But," she went on, "I'll get what I can, anyway. I'm going to have my chance. Vincent!"

Her voice was so low that he had to press against the screen to hear her; and her words came in an incredibly ferocious whisper, that turned his blood cold:

"If ever you tell him, Vincent, I swear to Gawd I'll kill you!"

XXI

THROUGH the front basement window Mrs. Kennedy saw Angelica returning, a shockingly disheveled figure in the sweltering midday heat. She hurried to the door, with the baby in her arms.

"Oh, Angie!" she cried. "You cruel, cruel, bad girl! Where have you been? I've been near crazy, left alone here all night and morning with the baby, and not a penny in the house. Of course I couldn't do my work—"

"Hush!" said Angelica sternly. "Don't bother me. I'm too tired. I had to walk all the way back. Make me some tea!"

She took the child in her arms and sat down in the rocking-chair, holding it pressed against her breast and staring over its head, indifferent to its crying and the feeble beating of its little hands.

She had her tea and bread with it; then she lay down on her cot, always with the child in her arms, and fell asleep. Mrs. Kennedy looked in upon them, saw them both quiet, the little, downy head resting against Angelica's shoulder, and she devoutly hoped that this period of rest might solace her daughter after whatever demoniacal adventure she had undergone that night. She picked up her pail and went out to work.

When she came in again at five o'clock, they were both gone.

Polly was reading, stretched out on the sofa of her charming little room, near the window which gave her a fine view of the Hudson and a cool breeze. Her maid had gone out, and she was quite alone in her little flat, content and languid, rejoicing in her dignified solitude.

Here she was living as she liked to live, with her music, her books, her very few and very casual friends, and long, long hours of delicate idleness. She enjoyed the blissful serenity of a convalescent, or a freed prisoner. After her two heart-breaking experiences of married life, after the anguish of her dear child's death, she was happy now to be quite alone, to love no one, and to be hurt by no one. She wished to spend the rest of her life alone.

Eddie had arranged her affairs so that she once more received her decent little income. She didn't inquire as to how he had done this. She suspected that for the present it must be coming direct from his pocket, but she preferred not to know.

She had a vague intention of some day divorcing Vincent, but she was never capable of action without some spur. There wasn't any cause now. She was rid of him, and she had her money again. Her deepest instinct—the instinct of a woman by temperament unfitted to make her own way in the world — caused her to value her money above anything. It meant all that was desirable in life—ease, dignity, and freedom.

How happy she was in her loose, fresh white wrapper, looking so much younger, so much more charming—smoking her thin little cigarettes and reading some book which entirely engaged her attention—agreeably conscious, none the less, of a nice little supper left by her devoted servant in the ice-box! It was only half past five, but she was growing hungry, and she was dallying with this idea of supper, when the door-bell rang.

This was startling, for the boy in the hall down-stairs was supposed to stop intruders and to telephone up to her before admitting them. And so loud a ring!

Again! She got up and opened the door.

She gasped at the spectacle of Angelica with a baby in her arms.

"My *dear* Angelica!" she cried. "I never—"

"Let me sit down," said Angelica. "I'm dead tired."

So she came into Polly's tranquil sitting-room, as out of place there as a wild animal—the fierce, rough Angelica with her wailing baby. She sat down on the sofa and held the child up—a wretched, frail little creature, with a wizen, troubled face.

"See him? Two months old."

"He's sweet. But, my dear, I didn't know you were married."

"I'm not married. Listen, Mrs. Geraldine! I got to have a talk with you."

"Of course! But, my dear, isn't there something you could do for your baby? He seems so—"

"He's sick. He's sick all the time; but the doctor says if he gets good care, there's no reason why he shouldn't grow up strong and all right. It does make him kind of an extra trouble now, but after you've had him here a few months, Mrs. Geraldine—"

"*I've* had him *here!*"

"Listen!" cried Angelica, in anguish. "Please, please, Mrs. Geraldine, don't say no! Wait till you hear. Wait till you think. Think about that baby you lost. Oh, do, for Gawd's sake, Mrs. Geraldine, take this baby!"

"My dear girl!" cried Polly. "You must be mad! What in the world are you talking about?"

"Oh, please, please, please, for Gawd's sake! Just think of the poor little feller you lost. Take this one instead. I *can't* keep him, Mrs. Geraldine. He'll only die. You're too good and kind to let a little baby die. You *got* to take him. You'll never have a moment's peace, night or day, if you don't!"

"But, Angelica, it's outrageous!"

"I don't know the words to use. I don't know how to make you. Oh, Mrs. Geraldine, I can only just beg and pray to you to take him!"

"My dear, I'll help you, if I can. I'll be glad to lend you money, or help you in any other way."

"No—I can't keep him. You see, Mrs. Geraldine, I'm going to marry Eddie, and I can't ever let him know about this."

"Angelica!" cried Polly, aghast. "I certainly won't help you to deceive Eddie."

"I know; but it would be much, much worse to tell him. He's crazy about me, and I can make him happy. This is the only wrong thing I've ever done, *ever*, and I'm never going to do another. I'm going

to be good as gold, Mrs. Geraldine. If Eddie knew, he'd never forgive me. I'd never get a chance to be good. That's why I came to you. On account of Eddie, won't you do it to make him happy?"

"I could *not* deceive Eddie."

"Oh, *why* not? Why, for Gawd's sake, tell the truth and spoil Eddie's life, and be the death of this poor little feller and the ruin of me? Oh, just take him! Take him!" she cried, tears running down her cheeks. "You'll love him. You'll be awful glad to feel him next to you in bed, first thing in the morning. You'll love him so. You're the only one I know in the world that I wouldn't mind leaving him with. I know he cries an awful lot, but that's because he's sick; and if you take him, and he has the best of everything, he'll soon be fat and well, and you'll be proud of him. Oh, say you will!"

Tears stood in Polly's eyes.

"My dear, you mustn't give up your child. I'll help you, so that you can keep him."

"No, no! I can't! I'm going to marry Eddie."

"Give up the idea. Go off somewhere and live quietly with your dear little baby."

"No! You can't support me and him both. It would just be me and mommer over again—me going out by the day to keep him alive, and the two of us having nothing—no chances, no nothing. That's if he'd even live. No; the only, only thing is for you to take him."

"But, Angelica, what in the world would I do with him?"

"Get a good nurse. I'll find one, if you want, from a hospital."

"But what would people say?"

"Say he's yours. No one would know the difference. Tell Eddie he's yours. Tell Vincent, too."

"Vincent wouldn't believe it."

"Well, he could say so, anyway. My Gawd, that's little enough to do for the poor little feller!"

"It's not a little thing, Angelica—it's a great deal, to expect Vincent to say he is your child's father."

"Well, he is!" said Angelica. "I forgot to tell you that."

XXII

"It seems to be my fate," said Polly to herself, "to be always forgiving and benefiting those that despitefully use me. Imagine me taking this child—Vincent's child—and not feeling the least resentment toward Angelica. I'm only sorry for her."

She was watching the baby lying on the lap of a lively and capable young nurse, whom she had got by telephone.

"I'm going to adopt this child," she had explained to the young woman. "His mother can't keep him."

"It's a risk," said the nurse. "You never know how they'll turn out; but he's a pretty little fellow—big gray eyes and all. He's been badly fed, but I guess we can build him up."

Polly lapsed into a strange, an inexpressible mood. Vincent's baby! Wasn't it really sent to her to take the place of the one she had so cruelly lost? She certainly didn't intend to pass the child off as her own, but she would adopt it and bring it up. She would love it. The starved and thwarted love which no one else wanted welled up in her heart.

"He'll be a lot of trouble to you," said the nurse, looking about the orderly, pretty little place. "You certainly are good to take such a burden on yourself."

"I lost a little child of my own," said Polly.

And a dreadful pity for herself, and for Angelica, came over her.

She might well be sorry for Angelica, going out of the house without that little burden in her arms.

This was the supreme hour of Angelica's punishment—the inhuman struggle between her heart and her brain. She did not look upon it as a punishment, however; she looked upon this horrible renunciation of her child as a part of the price she was obliged to pay for a magnificent future. She was bent, resolute, with all the savage resolution of her lawless soul, to marry Eddie and to obtain all that she so desired. If she must sacrifice her child, then she would do so, though it left a wound never to be healed.

She didn't seek for happiness; if it had been that she wanted, she would have kept her little baby. She was ready and willing to give up happiness for success. She wished to vindicate herself, to give proof to the world of the power which she knew to be within herself.

Oh, to be going home alone, with empty arms! It was too cruel! She longed for the feel of that little body, for the sound of its feeble voice, for its eyes looking up at

her in pain and innocence. She walked through the streets with streaming eyes, running against people, indifferent to abuse or remonstrance.

"I *can't* go home without him!" she gasped. "Oh, my little feller! I can't go home and see his little clothes—and his empty basket!"

She stopped short.

"No!" she said. "I can't do this. I thought I could, but I can't. I got to have him back. I'd rather he died home with me. Oh, I wish we *were* dead, the two of us, dead and buried—him and me in one grave!"

She turned and retraced her long road to Polly's house, as far as the door; but she did not go in.

"No! Him in there with a trained nurse—no! I'll give him his chance, my poor little feller; and I'll give myself a chance, too," she added.

She started down-town again; but the nearer she got to home, the more unbearable was the idea of entering there, alone.

"If only I was over this first night!" she moaned. "If I could only just forget him till to-morrow!"

Mrs. Kennedy kept on working. She didn't dare to stop, to give herself a moment to think.

They were both gone. Very well! She would simply expect them back, resolutely refusing to think where they had gone, what they might be doing. At five o'clock in the afternoon she began to clean her flat. Then she cooked a nice little supper and set it in the oven to keep warm. She mixed condensed milk and water in a bottle for the baby. She boiled its dirty clothes. Then, in a desperate search for work to do, she found an old pair of white shoes of Angelica's, and began to clean them, singing all the while in a weird, cracked voice:

"*Af*-ter the ball is *o*-ver, af-*ter* the ball is done."

She was trying with all her might to keep out of her head a terrible vision of a young mother standing on a bridge at night, with her baby in her arms.

Still humming, she went into the bedroom, undressed, and got into bed, in a waking nightmare, half hypnotizing herself with her monotonous little song. She was too far gone even to feel relieved when at last she heard Angelica's footsteps in the hall, heard her go into the kitchen and light the gas. Then silence. She lay listening for the baby's cry; there wasn't a sound.

"What can she be doing in there?" she thought. "And what makes the baby so quiet?"

Fear struggled against the lethargy that engulfed her. She got up, went to the kitchen, and stood in the doorway in her long, old-fashioned nightgown, regarding her child. Angelica sat beside the table, with a package in her lap.

"Angie! Where's the baby?" cried her mother.

"Gone," said Angelica. "I got a lady to take him."

"Your own child?" screamed her mother. "Your own little baby? Oh, shame on you!"

"Shut up! You don't understand. Do you think I liked to give it away?"

"Then get him back! Get him back, Angie! I'll work for him till I drop. Don't give him up!"

"He's gone, I tell you. Let me alone! Can't you see how I feel?"

"Then why, why, why did you do it, Angie?"

Angelica stared at her somberly.

"I don't know," she said. "I had to. I thought it would be the best thing for him. She—the woman that's taken him—she can do a lot for him. She's kind and good. You'd like her."

"Who is she?"

Angelica did not intend to tell. She was too well aware of the preposterousness of having taken Vincent's child to his wife.

"No one you know," she said.

Her mother was completely softened by this new idea, that Angelica had given up her dearly loved child for its own good.

"You poor girl!" she said. "I suppose you meant to do what was best for him. But—"

"I thought it would help me, too," said Angelica. "I couldn't keep him."

Mrs. Kennedy was shocked. She opened her mouth to speak again, but Angelica stopped her with a quick gesture.

"No more!" she said. "I've had enough. Now you better go back to bed."

"I don't want to leave you," said her mother. She could imagine how hideous would be Angelica's loneliness.

"You better!"

"Why? What are you going to do?"

Angelica held up her tiny package.

"Heroin," she said. "I got it off a feller I know. I don't want to think about anything to-night."

For an instant the small figure in the long night-dress wavered; then, with a pitiful scream, she ran out of the room and cast herself on her bed.

"It's too much, God!" she cried. "I can't bear any more. Take me to-night, oh, merciful God!"

Mrs. Kennedy listened in vain all through the night. From time to time she dozed, to wake with a start of fright. She had no knowledge of drugs, only horrible superstitions. She expected Angelica to be changed in some way beyond recognition. Would she be violent—fight and struggle with her? Would she kill herself—set the house on fire?

At dawn she waked from a brief nap, resentful to find herself still alive. Sick with apprehension, weary beyond all measure, she went into the kitchen, to see what had become of her child.

Angelica was asleep, with her head on the table. Beside her lay her tiny package, unopened.

She raised her head and looked at her mother with dark and heavy eyes.

"All right, mommer!" she said. "It's over!"

"What? What's over?"

"All of—of that. I'm going to start all over again."

"You can't, Angie. You can't undo what's done."

"I have," she said solemnly. "I've just wiped it out. I haven't done any harm to any one but myself, and I'm going to forget that. All the traces of it are gone. Eddie 'll never know; and so he'll be happy! I have undone it, mommer; it's just the same now as if *that* had never happened."

Her mother, shivering, racked by her night's anguish, looked sternly at her.

"That's because you don't know," she said. "You don't know yet what you've done!"

XXIII

Mrs. Kennedy made no preparation for going to work that day. She suffered from a strange, an inexplicable malady. She didn't want to go to bed. She sat upright in a rocking-chair, still in her night-dress, staring at the kitchen wall before her with a faint little frown.

Angelica washed and dressed herself neatly, and got ready some breakfast—not very quickly, for she wasn't accustomed to cooking, but with the care and deftness that were so natural to her. It was, when done, a daintier and better meal than her mother had ever served.

"Now, mommer!" she said. "Come on! Sit down!"

"I can't eat, Angelica."

"You can drink some coffee, anyway."

And she took her mother by the hand and led her to the table—a poor, frail, barefooted little thing, with her gray hair hanging about her haggard face.

"Sit down," said Angelica again. "Now, then!"

Her mother drank a cup of coffee greedily, and gave her familiar little sigh.

"That *was* nice!" she said.

Her daughter succeeded in making her eat a little as well.

"Now you got to lie down," she said.

"I can't. I've got to clean the halls."

"I'll do it, mommer."

"Nonsense, Angelica! You don't know a thing about it."

"I guess I can learn. Go on, mommer, lie down!"

She straightened the bed and patted the thin little pillow.

"Now, mommer, tell me! How do you do it? Where do you start?"

"Angie, I can't let you. You're tired to death, child. I'm more used to it."

But Angelica would not listen to her. She went out, resolutely, with the pail and the cloth and the scrubbing-brush, to do for her mother for one day what her mother had done for her for nineteen years.

It was Angelica's disposition to enjoy martyrdom. She never felt sorry for herself; she didn't now. It was work which must be done, and she was anxious to do it properly. She was in that state of intense fatigue when one craves more and more physical activity. She scrubbed all the stone stairs, mopped the corridor, went on working and working and thinking and thinking.

She came down-stairs at one o'clock and went out to buy something for lunch.

"What is there to do this afternoon?" she asked.

"Nothing," said Mrs. Kennedy. "I haven't got half the work to do in this place that I had in the old one—only three washings."

"I know. Well, mommer, I suppose we'll have to get some more money from somewhere. I'll go out and look for a job, I guess."

She found one without much trouble. Her sort of job—unskilled, transitory, ill-paid—was plentiful.

"I'm starting in to-morrow morning," she told her mother, when she came home. "Now, if there's any ink, I guess I'll write to Eddie."

"Why?" asked her mother.

"Well, it seems he don't know anything about—what happened, and I guess we'll be married after all."

"You mean to say you're still set on that, Angie?" cried her mother. "It's wicked—downright *wicked*—to deceive a good man so."

"I don't think so," Angelica replied. "What I did was bad enough, but I don't think it's wicked not to tell about it. If you'd been in prison you wouldn't go around telling every one about it, would you?"

"That isn't the same at all, Angie. I don't want you to tell 'every one'; only the man you're going to marry."

"He wouldn't be the man I'm going to marry very long, if I did tell him. He'd never speak to me again. I know Eddie! And he's too good to lose," she added. "Of course, something may go wrong, but I don't think so. I think I've got him!"

So she wrote:

DEAR EDDIE:

I guess you think it is very queer not hearing from me for nearly a year. I did not think I would write to you, because when I thought it over I thought I better not marry you. I thought maybe we could not get on, on account of being so different, but I have changed my mind, and now I will if you still want. Let me know if you feel the same about it, and then I will write again and tell you all about how I am getting along. I have not got any letters from you, because we moved away from the old place, and I was sick a long time, and did not go up there to see if there were any letters, and then when I got well and did go the woman there was very cranky and said she gave them all back to the postman because I did not leave any address behind.

Well, let me hear how you feel about this.

ANGELICA.

"Now!" she said as she dropped it into the box. "Now, if only, *only* I can have my chance!"

One might imagine that her mother would be pleased with the new and complete change that came over Angelica—her third phase, so to speak; but she wasn't. This cool, quiet resolution seemed to Mrs. Kennedy more profoundly immoral than all her daughter's past wildness. It would be a horrible thing, it would upset all her universe, if she were forced to see such guilt as Angelica's going undiscovered and forgotten.

Even a sinful life would have seemed to her more hopeful, for it would have presupposed a girl driven to desperation by shame and remorse; but Angelica going off to her work in the morning, neat and alert, her old-time swagger supplanted by a steely self-assurance, was an outrage. She was actually ambitious, too; she didn't seem to know that her life was ruined and ended. She studied in the evening, writing exercises, learning things by heart, going at the English tongue, spelling, composition, and literature as the books decreed, fiercely concentrated upon her work. She wouldn't go to the movies, or to take a walk; she wouldn't even talk; she just sat there, with her books.

Her efforts at self-improvement were not touching, had nothing of stumbling pathos about them. She was too clever, too careful. She learned to dress with quiet precision, without paint, without flamboyant allure. She learned to speak better, she stopped swearing, except under great provocation; she even learned to control her temper to a degree that alarmed her mother. The hot, sudden anger was there—it came as readily as ever; but it was still now. She didn't "fly out."

And all this disturbed and exasperated Mrs. Kennedy. She had no sympathy for any of it.

"Whatever in the world do you expect to *do?*" she asked irritably, one evening, while Angelica sat reading a paper book on etiquette.

"I'm going to be as good as the best of them," said Angelica. "Why shouldn't I be?"

"Plenty of reason why you shouldn't!" said her mother tartly.

But the wicked continued to prosper, until Mrs. Kennedy almost believed that God gave no justice.

One day a letter came for Angelica. This startled her mother, for they never got letters.

"It's from him," she thought. "Bad news, maybe!"

But it was postmarked "New York"; it couldn't be from Eddie.

"Now, whoever in the world can be writing to Angie!" she thought, alarmed and uneasy, as she always was over the girl's mysterious activities. However she might regard Angelica's moral shortcomings, she loved her only child. She knew that she deserved punishment, but she would have given her own life to save her from it.

Directly Angie came in from work she handed her the letter.

"Oh, Gawd!" she muttered. "Mommer! It's from her—the one that's got the baby."

Her face was ghastly. Perhaps, after all, she hadn't escaped so easily as her mother imagined. Perhaps, after all, she longed for her child and missed it with immeasurable bitterness, like any human mother.

Angelica couldn't bear to open the letter. For what other reason would Polly write to her but to tell her of the baby's illness or death? She had warmly urged Angelica to come whenever she wished to see the child, but Angelica had refused. She didn't want to see him there with Polly. She wished to—she must—look upon him as utterly lost to her. Once in a while she was overcome with longing, and would telephone simply to ask after him, and, reassured, would resolutely turn her mind away. But if he were really gone, no longer in the world!

She opened the letter at last, and the very sight of it, before her brain had grasped its meaning, comforted her — the neatly formed letters, the friendly look of the page:

DEAR ANGELICA:

Dress yourself in your very nicest and go to see Miss Sillon in her shop, "Fine Feathers," on the south side of Washington Square. I spoke to her about you, and I believe there is a very good opportunity there for you. They want a milliner—some one to take a small salary and a share in the profits. They are nice girls, and you'll enjoy being with them. I really think it is just what you want. Anyway, try it, won't you? And let me know if it suits.

Your friend, as always,

POLLY GERALDINE.

P. S.—He is doing splendidly.

Angelica read the letter to her mother, all but the signature, and ate her supper in silence.

"Sit down, mommer," she said. "I'll wash the dishes. I guess I'll lay off for a while to-morrow and go and see about this thing."

It was Angelica at her newest and best who walked across Fourth Street the next morning. She had for a long time sternly withheld most of her wages from her mother, who needed the money for vital necessities, and had bought herself a decent outfit, to go with her new soul. She was plainly dressed, but no longer with a trace of shabbiness. She wore a neat dark suit, a black sailor hat, good boots and gloves. Her swagger was gone, and so was her provocative and insolent glance; she had a sobriety and decorum quite beyond reproach.

She saw the shop, and entered. It was a small private house, dilapidated and moribund, fitted out with purple and white striped curtains at the windows and a great sign-board over the front gate—a wooden peacock, brilliantly colored, with "Fine Feathers" painted in bold black letters across it. The shop was what had once been a front parlor—a long, narrow room with a marble mantelpiece and an ornate ceiling. It was furnished now, with great audacity, solely by four kitchen chairs painted white, with round purple cushions on them, a table on which were strewn original designs for wraps and dresses done in crayons, and a fine pair of black velvet portières concealing the back room. Four long mirrors were set into the walls.

The owners were both poor and clever. They knew well that this childish brightness would be thought artistic, original, and distinguished by the greatly desirable bourgeoisie, and that the more sophisticated would be amused. As for Angelica, she was impressed.

A tall young girl with fluffy red hair hastened in from the back room.

"Yes?" she asked with non-committal amiability.

"Mrs. Geraldine sent me," said Angelica. "I'd like to see Miss Sillon, please."

"Oh! I'm Miss Devery, but I'll do. I'm the partner. I've heard about you. Millinery, isn't it?"

"Yes," said Angelica confidently.

"Sit down, won't you? We can talk it over a bit. Miss Sillon will be in presently. You see, Miss Sillon and I just started this place six months ago, but we're doing so well that we feel justified in branching out a bit. So we thought of a millinery depart-

ment. We were speaking of it to Mrs. Geraldine—she's one of our oldest customers, you know—and she said she knew just the person. She said you were a wonder at hats."

Angelica smiled a little. She was surprised and delighted by this pretty red-haired girl with her naive air and babyish voice—a lady, if ever there was one, and yet so simple and friendly with Angelica. She wanted greatly to work in that purple and white room with her.

"Now," said Miss Devery, "I'll tell you what we can do. We'd let you have both the windows, to display your hats; and that's worth something. Then we'd give you ten per cent of all the sales you make, and provide the materials as well. We have lots of scraps and odds and ends; so you'd be under no expense at all."

"But I'd have to have a salary to start with."

Miss Devery bit her lip doubtfully.

"Well, you see," she said candidly, "we're rather short of cash. We've made quite a bit, but after we've paid our living expenses we turn it all back into the business. We're growing fast, and if you come in with us now you'll really have a splendid chance. We have a perfectly fine connection, you know—some of the very nicest people."

"But—" began Angelica, and stopped short. "I'd like to think it over," she said. "How long can I take?"

"Why, a week, if you wish; but I hope you'll come. You're just the sort of girl we want. We don't commercialize the thing. We want to keep it *nice*."

Angelica smiled again with a dreary sort of triumph. So she had fooled one of the nice ones, anyway!

"Of course," went on Miss Devery, "if you'd rather, you could provide a little capital and your own materials, and we'd let you right in with us. Miss Sillon would show you the books and so on."

Angelica had risen. She could see her own reflection in one of the long mirrors, and she could not help feeling that she really looked more of a lady than the girl who actually was one.

"I'll let you know," she said carefully. She was fearfully tempted to try, just for once, to talk as they did. "It's awfully attractive," she said. "I'd love to go into it with you; but I want to talk it over with mother."

It succeeded! Miss Devery noticed nothing at all strange in her tone or her words.

"Telephone just as soon as you decide, won't you?" she said.

Mrs. Kennedy wasn't in the flat when Angelica got home. She was up-stairs, cleaning a vacant flat, and thither Angelica followed her. She was scrubbing the pan of a gas-stove—a vilely dirty thing, heavily incrusted with grease and slime, in which were embedded dead matches and bits of food.

"Mother!"

The unaccustomed word surprised her. She turned to look into Angelica's face smiling down at her.

"Mother, will you support me for a while?"

"Why, child, of course! I'll do whatever I can for you. Have you lost your job?"

"No, but I'm going to try something new. It may not bring in anything much for quite a while, but I think after a time it 'll be a regular gold-mine. And it's—it's very *nice*. I know Eddie would like me to do it!"

XXIV

She hadn't allowed herself to think about Eddie's reply. She insisted to herself that it would be, must be, favorable; but when the letter came, when at last she held it in her hand, she was panic-stricken. She reverted.

"Oh, Gawd!" she murmured. "What if he's changed his mind?"

This is what she read:

My dearest Girl:

You can't possibly imagine how I felt when I got your letter. I was still in the hospital where I had been for five months with a bad foot, and, to tell you the truth, I didn't care much whether I ever went out of it again. I can't explain it very well, but there is something about the war and this filthy, brutal way of living that makes it unbearable to lose any pleasures or joys out of life. You get to believe that nothing matters except being happy. And you *are* my happiness. When I thought I'd lost you, I didn't care about going on. Of course, there's your country, and your family, and your ambition, and so on, but somehow they don't seem *real*. I thought of you all the time. I wrote and wrote, and didn't get any answer. Then I asked Vincent to look you up, but he wrote that you'd moved and he couldn't trace you. I don't quite see how I could have gone back on the firing-line again if you hadn't written. It's bad enough anyway,

but it wouldn't be bearable without some sort of guiding star. Don't think I'm getting sentimental, Angelica, but you are that, you know, to me.

I hope this will soon be over. It's worse than I thought it would be; but I'm glad I came. I wouldn't like other fellows to be doing this job for me. But when I get home! It seems like a vision of Paradise—you waiting for me, and my home, and good food and a nice, clean bed, and hot water!

I don't want you to think that I've deteriorated, that I'm always thinking of physical things, because I'm not. When you're always uncomfortable, you can't help thinking too much about comfort; but I think much more about other things. I think a lot about what is the best way to use your life. I can see lots of things I've done wrong. I look forward awfully to making a fresh start. It will all seem so new, like being born again. Everything will seem remarkable and interesting—all sort of things I didn't use to notice.

And to think that there was a time when I used to think quite calmly about being married to you! Of course, my dear, I always did look forward to it as the greatest possible happiness, but I more or less took it for granted—the sort of happiness a fellow always expects. But now, Angelica, it seems as wonderful and beautiful and far off as heaven. I can't even really believe that I'll see you ever again. I've got so used to being a lousy, muddy, hunted animal that I can't believe it will ever end. I don't even long for the end; it seems so impossible. I have a damnable conviction—an obsession, I suppose they'd call it—that every one gets killed in the war. So many of the chaps I knew have gone, often killed beside me—and in the hospital, dying so sickeningly! I can't help imagining that every one in the world is dying. So that the idea of coming home and marrying you is—I can't describe what it is. Really and literally a dream of heaven.

Angelica, darling, don't disappoint me again! I couldn't bear it. Write to me faithfully, as often as possible—even every day. It wouldn't be much to do, for you who are at home and safe and comfortable.

With all my heart,

EDDIE.

Now this letter might have disappointed another girl, but not Angelica. She didn't at all mind its being so little lover-like, so much concerned with Eddie and his feelings, and so little concerned with herself. She was, in fact, very proud that such a learned and serious young man as Eddie should write to her at all. She was overjoyed, exultant, to see that he still wanted her—with a sort of humility in her joy quite unusual in her.

"I won't disappoint him ever again!" she cried. "I'll do my very best. I'll just *live* for him! And if it's like a dream of heaven to him," she reflected, "so it is to me. I've suffered, too. It couldn't have been much worse for any one, anywhere. Oh, won't it be heaven to be *safe*—to be his wife, and settled there at Buena Vista, and rich, and every one looking up to me? A motor-car of my own, and lovely clothes, and a beautiful room! I'll have Miss Sillon and Miss Devery out to see me."

She looked at herself in the mirror.

"I'm getting to look refined," she thought; "not factory any more. When I can have real grand clothes, I'll be *beautiful!* Vincent said I lost heaven when I stopped loving him," she reflected. "Well, I'll get it back again, with Eddie!"

In spite of his entreaty, she waited for more than a week before she replied to Eddie's letter, for she wished to have something to tell him. She spent two entire evenings over her letter, and when it was done there wasn't a mistake in it, in spelling, in grammar, or in sentiment; for Angelica was fast learning the correct way to feel.

DEAR EDDIE:

Your letter was wonderful, and I could not write one nearly so good, or so interesting. I understand how you feel, but I do not know how to say anything. I feel like that, too, afraid to expect any happiness, but I want to fight for it. I want to tell God that I will not be cheated, and that it has all got to come out right.

I go to the movies with mother whenever there is a war picture, to try and get some idea what it is like over there, but I guess no one can. That is another thing I don't dare to think about—all that you must be suffering. But, Eddie dear, I will try my best to make it up to you when you get back.

I don't go to the factory any more, but I have a very nice place as a milliner with two girls who have a shop in Washington Square. I am doing nicely. I design the hats myself and make them, and Miss Sillon says it will not be long before my hats are recognized everywhere in New York. "Angélique," I call myself on the label I sew in the hats. She says they are almost too daring, but very original.

She wanted to write more—much more—about her hats, but she knew it wouldn't do. She was required to fill up the letter with general observations and with her interest in Eddie, and she did so.

She was pleased with this letter, and yet it troubled her. She felt both mean and cruel. She knew that she had nothing to give Eddie; she knew that in every way she was defrauding and injuring him. To stifle her distress she had only her profound faith in herself, her conviction that she had obliterated the past and could and would make a glorious future. She couldn't help contrasting her labored and prudent letter

with his careless candor. Evidently he didn't care what he said. He just wrote her what came to his mind. He felt so sure of her!

"I haven't really done him any harm," she protested, lying awake in the dark. "If he never knows, it's just exactly the same—for him—as if it had never happened."

And still she knew that she was forcing him to play the part he would have hated and rejected beyond any other—that of the poor dishonored fool. She didn't even love him.

"I'll learn to love him!" she cried. "I love him a little bit already."

And still she knew how much she disliked even the memory of his kisses.

Sometimes a wave of sheer terror overcame her.

"No one's ever done such a thing," she thought, remembering all the stories she had read. "It can't be done. Somehow—some day—it would be found out. It always is!"

But this she could combat.

"I don't care if it's never been done!" she would cry. "*I'll* do it! I'll marry Eddie, and he'll *never know*, and it 'll all end happily. I'll make it! I *won't* be found out!"

(*To be concluded in the October number of* MUNSEY'S MAGAZINE)

WHEN WE ARE DEAD

WHEN I am dead,
Will you remember
What I said
To-day, here by the stream?
I shall remember,
Though I'm dead,
All that we did,
All that we said,
Just what you wore,
And all we swore
Here, in a dream,
Dear, by the stream,
When I am dead.

When you are dead,
I shall be long dead, too.
Will any then have memory
Of us, think you?
And, walking by the stream
Among the flowers,
As now we walk,
Heads close in happy talk
As now are ours—
Two in a dream
As we, beloved, are now,
Deep vow to vow—
Ah, will they know
That we beside them go?

And will the wild rose tell
I plucked it once as well,
And it lay pressed
In your delicious breast?
And will the stream
Still sing on of our dream,
As it does now?
Or will they never know
I loved you so,
And to each other say
None ever loved as they?

Richard Leigh

Turkey Red 58

WHAT HAPPENED AFTER SARAH BRUCE, STOCK CLERK, SHOOK OUT AN OLD-FASHIONED TABLE-CLOTH

By Ruth Gilbert Cochran

HELLO there, Ray! Say, listen, girly, I'm sorry I'm late, but things has been happening so fast lately I hardly know where I'm at. Yes, I know my arm's in a sling. Listen, I'll tell you all about it—just gimme time. Same old table and everything, huh? Gee, it's great to see you and the old Goody Lunch-Room again! I'm only away from New York three weeks, but it seems like a year, honest.

Oh, here's our girl! What are you having, Ray? I'll take cream tuna, mocha tart, and Vienna coffee, miss, with plenty whipped cream, see?

Well, Ray, how's it coming back at the Mail-Order Emporium? Any raises? That's my idea of a joke, Ray. Any time the emporium gives a raise—any time! I leave it to you, needle—you got the dope.

Well, I bet you and the bunch was pretty much surprised that day when I got weepy, and me in the emporium four years, and always, if I do say it, with a smile for customers and old Rosenbach, too. I won't say I don't sometimes get kind o' snappy with you girls, but us girls understand one another, you might say. You gotta give and take. But wait, you'll die laughing when I tell you what set me off.

I guess the Subway crowd sort o' got on my nerves that morning. Being kicked in the heel of my new fifteen-dollar navy-blue kid pumps by a fat guy, leaving a scar there for life and not even saying "Excuse me," took the pep out o' me some, too. Trying to stick up the piece that tore off made me late, and you know how sweet Rosenbach is when a girl's late. You tell her, Fido—you got the tale straight.

So I was feeling kind o' blue and cross, and all of a sudden I just hated the city and the crowds and the smells and everything. I tried to shake it off, and began sorting out stuff for the catalogue-writers—you gotta watch your step there, you know. These college-educated hens with the broad black ribbon on their glasses can sure make it unpleasant for any girl that gets to daydreaming over their stuff. Believe me, when one of those dames gives you that right-off-the-ice look, you wonder why you're still allowed to live and breathe.

Still and all, I'd kind o' like to go into the advertisin' department, their boss is so good-looking; but does he hate himself—not so you'd scarcely notice it! You can tell by the way he straightens up his tie when one of us girls smiles at him.

I was getting along all right, and had shook my grouch pretty well, when Irving brought me a box of them red cotton tablecloths to tag up. When I shook out that Turkey Red 58, why, all of a sudden I just wasn't in the city at all. I was sitting by the supper-table in grandma's kitchen up-State, and the oil lamp was shining on the plate full of hot biscuits just out of the oven, and the blue glass dish full of peach preserves. Honest, Ray, I could *smell* them preserves, just the way they used to be when I was a kid, after mama left me and grandma took me up to the farm. Poor mama!

Well, then Rosenbach called me sharp-like, and I come to with a start, and the first thing I knew I was crying right in front of Sadie Kleinschmidt and everybody. Not that she wasn't awful sweet about it, and brought me a glass of water and everything; but you know how being in charge of us girls in the buying-room has sort o' went to her head. All the while she was petting me on the back I could just feel her casting looks over at Mr. Rosenbach's desk that said:

"Ain't I lovely? See how motherly I am to my girls when they're in trouble!"

You know, Ray, you can generally tell when sympathy's real and when it's just to attract attention. And sure enough, old Rosenbach come over, and as I was through spluttering by that time, he said—you know how he says things that Yiddish way—he said:

"She should have a vacation, maybe. This hot weather takes the roses out of her cheeks already."

And I says, mopping up my face thoroughly, I says:

"Oh, Mr. Rosenbach, if I don't get into the country, I'll die!"

I felt that way, too, I'll tell the world. So Rosenbach says to Sadie Kleinschmidt:

"Well, Miss Kleinschmidt," he says, "let Miss Bruce have her two weeks' vacation as soon as she wants. It makes the dull season now, anyways, and she should feel better before the fall rush begins."

Honest, Ray, I could 'a' kissed him, whiskers and all, but of course I spared him the shock. I only said:

"Thanks, Mr. Rosenbach, you sure are a doll!"

That made him smile real pleased. I finished tagging up the table-cloths without slopping over any more, and that afternoon I made out my vacation slip and got my two weeks' pay in advance—just like that! You got to hand it to old Rosenbach—when he says a thing, he means it; and a lot of his cross looks is on account of his eyebrows getting in his way, I figure. You know how they stick out. You could braid 'em. But he's a good old guy, I'll tell the world.

Well, after I got home to aunty's that night I hadn't no more idea where I was going than the man in the moon. Usually you kind o' plan your vacation months ahead, like that time you and me planned so long on going to Atlantic City, and when we got there we had fog all the time and was froze stiff besides by the old ladies at the hotel for daring to laugh above a whisper. You remember! I tell you the old crabs ain't all in the ocean; oh, no! And we says never again for a hotel life, with all the eats printed so nice on the menu and only painted on the plates; and the only good-looking men so firmly tied they're afraid to bat an eyelid.

No, I wanted to go into the real country, and I did the craziest thing. I took a railroad folder and a pin, and I shut my eyes and I says:

"Where the pin sticks, I'll go!"

So I stuck the pin in and opened my eyes, and the pin was sticking in Essex. Can you beat it? Essex, the same little burg I'd left four years ago, when I thought I couldn't stand the farm any longer. I had to laugh when I thought of the grand ideas I'd had of making good in the city and going back with a limousine; and here I was with just forty dollars to bless me, and aunty's board-money to take out of that!

You know mama died when I was twelve years old, and grandma—my dad's mother, that is—took me back to the old farm on Lake Champlain to live with her. You see, being on the stage had sort o' queered mama with my dad's folks from the start; and although she tried living on the farm when they were first married, she couldn't stand it long, and after a few years of sitting around and offering to help grandma, who's terrible brisk and hates to be helped, the break had to come. Mama begged dad to let her go back on the stage and get away from grandma's bossing, but he said no.

Then mama got an offer from old Don Mackay to go on in "The Jolly Rounders." You know how pretty mama was. So she said she was just going, anyway, and dad said if she did she'd never see him again, and grandma added a lot of sarcastic remarks about meanness being bred in the bone and bound to come out. And you know mama wasn't never mean or wild, but just young and full of life and pretty. Say, you oughta seen her as *Superba, Queen of Day!*

Well, anyway, her having this offer from Don Mackay brought things to a head. Mama accepted it, and dad had no more to say, but he left that night, saying he was going to the Klondike, and mama beat it to the city, taking me with her. We got along fine, me staying with aunty while mama was on the road. You know aunty keeps a theatrical boarding-house. And then mama got pneumonia. I don't want to talk about that part—I never can.

So after a while, when she heard that mama was dead, grandma came to the city and took me back to the farm with her. I was little and lonesome and scared, and I didn't like the people at aunty's very much; so I was glad to find somebody wanted me.

I had four years with grandma on the farm. Was she strict? Well, you tell her, onion, you'll bring tears to her eyes! Honest, I'm telling you, I hardly dared to act like my soul was my own. Grandma was so afraid that I was going to turn out wild and disgrace her, she was always wrestling in prayer with the Lord over me.

Of course grandma is old, and she never heard from dad, and I could understand she might get worried and cross; but I used to wish she could be more like the kind old ladies you read about—soft and loving, you know, with a white lace cap, and petting me up occasional. There never was nothing soft about grandma, nor her house, nor her clothes, nor nothing. Everything in the farmhouse looked so terribly clean it looked uncomfortable, if you know what I mean. And the furniture was all of this knobby walnut kind, with slippery horsehair seats.

Grandma dressed me in dark calico aprons and braided my hair back so tight it hurt. I used to stop on the road under a big elm-tree on my way to school and take out the braids, and then stop at the same place on the way home and braid it up again. I went to the district school, and my teacher was real nice to me. She was awfully queer and skinny, like a little old bird, but she liked me and used to try to cheer me up by telling me grandma was strict with me for my own good.

"Your grandma feels that she was always too indulgent to her son, and she doesn't want to make the same mistake with you," she said, and kind o' sighed. "Your father was such a handsome, headstrong boy, he could make her do anything he wanted her to, and he was the pride of her life," she said.

Grandma certainly was careful not to make any repetition of the indulgent act with me. I could never have any of the boys to see me, and I was kept busy Saturdays. And Sundays—oh, Sundays was awful! All day long we'd sit in the dark old parlor, and go through the Scotch Covenanter services. At noon we'd have a cold dinner, because grandma didn't believe in cooking on the Lord's day. Hot weather or cold, it was always the same. Whenever I see horsehair furniture now, it makes me feel so sleepy!

That was bad, but after grandma got word that dad had been killed in an explosion in a mine up in the Klondike, she got stricter with me than ever. She was sure that the Lord was punishing her for letting mama go back to the ways of perdition, and it was awful! I began to understand how mama felt when she just had to run away, and I wrote to aunty and told her all about it.

Aunty wrote back and sent me some money, and said if I wanted to come to New York she would find me a position. She told me I could have the third-floor hall room for thirty dollars a month, with meals at the second table. Aunty's all for the main chance, but that letter made me feel like a bird that's found the cage door open. I didn't know whether to light out on the quiet or to have it out with grandma first. Finally I decided I wasn't doing nothing wrong, and didn't have to sneak out; so one evening I told grandma I was going to the city to find some work to do. I told her I appreciated all she had done for me, but I felt I ought to do something useful, and oh, anyway, I said I couldn't stand it any longer and I just had to go!

Grandma was awful cold and quiet about it. She wouldn't say much about it that evening, but in the middle of the night I could hear her wrestling with the Lord in prayer over me, and I suppose she thought I was doomed.

In the morning she said she would ask just one thing of me. She asked me to promise her I wouldn't go on the stage before I was twenty-one. I had no intentions that way, being well aware that I had none of mama's looks except my eyes, which they say is like hers; and besides, I'd 'a' promised anything to get away quiet. So I promised, and grandma drove me down to the station, but wouldn't kiss me good-by. The only way I could tell she felt my going away at all was that her hands trembled a little. She'd rather die than show any feeling!

Well, I soon got a line on a job at the Mail-Order Emporium, and it wasn't long before I was a stock clerk in the buying-room, where I've been ever since, you might say. In all those four years I never went back to the country. I'm funny that way, real firm—not hard, like grandma, but just firm.

Not that I didn't *want* to go back! Some hot nights up in my hall bedroom, when the trucks kept me awake and the arc-light shone in my eyes all night long, I'd get to thinking how the lake breeze was blowing

through my old room at the farmhouse, and no noise outside but the crickets, so dark and cool and all; but I couldn't weaken. I'm firm!

So, for that reason, being firm, when I said I'd go where the pin stuck, I had to go to Essex. I hadn't wrote very often, but when I had, I'd get a postal-card from grandma, telling me she was well, and signed, "Yours in the Lord, M. Bruce." Not exactly running over with affection, I'll tell the surrounding populace!

I handed aunty my board-money in the morning, and told her I was going away for two weeks. She asked no questions.

"Have a good time, deary," she said, and went on giving the cook merry what-for for burning the cereal, as usual.

II

I TOOK the boat trip up, and being it was the middle of the week, I had the boat pretty well to myself. I slept 'most all day, and woke in time to get off at the Essex dock at five o'clock. I'm telling you there was five tin automobiles and three wagons there, besides a dozen assorted loafers and Charley Porter, the dock agent. I nearly did a Steve Brodie backward into the lake to see such a crowd. When I left Essex there wasn't a auto in the place.

When I recovered the power of speech, I says to Charley Porter, who was chewing a straw and looking at me real curious, but not recognizing me:

"Can I get a rig to take me to the Bruce farm?"

If I couldn't, I was planning to stay at the Essex Inn and walk out in the morning. It's only two miles outside the village.

Charley took the straw out of his mouth and pointed it over his shoulder.

"There's the Bruce wagon over by the shed," he says; "and Mrs. Bruce's new hired man is inside the shed, getting out some bar'ls. They expectin' ye?" he fires at me.

I only nods non-committal and walks over to the wagon. It was brand-new. Make out I wasn't surprised! I couldn't hardly believe it was grandma's, but what Charley, the dock agent, don't know about the five hundred inhabitants of Essex Township ain't knowable—he couldn't make a mistake!

So I waited around by the wagon a while, watching the village loafers wander back to the meat-market steps, which is their usual hang-out when the boat or the mail-train ain't in. All of a sudden some one right at my elbow sort o' gasps out:

"My God!"

I turned around, pretty startled. There was the biggest man I ever saw outside the movies, and in a regular Canuck get-up—check shirt, corduroy pants, high boots, and all. His face was hid behind a heavy black beard, but what you could see of it was real good-looking for an old man. He must 'a' been all of forty-five.

"Well, why the heavy astonishment?" I asks, giving him a haughty up-and-down like Miss Almeer does—you know, aunty's second floor front, the one who does society dames. Course I knew, Ray, I'd make a sensation in the country, although I just had on my blue georgette with the iridescent beads and my navy kid French pumps, the same things I wear to business, but still and all, I didn't expect to strike 'em dead, either.

"I—I beg pardon," the man stammered, "but—who are you?"

"My name is Sarah Bruce," I says, in a real lofty way, "and I'm planning to give my grandmother a surprise by riding out to the farm. You are her new hired man, I take it?"

I gives him a frozen look. He just stares for a minute; then he smiles a nice smile and says slowly:

"Yes, yes—Sarah Bruce. Well, well!"

"The poor nut thinks he's talking," I says to myself. "Give him time!"

Then he sort o' shook himself out o' the trance, and says:

"Your grandma will be real surprised to see you. Hop right in the wagon. Let me help you over the wheel—it's a little greasy there."

He had a nice deep voice, too.

Well, we drove off along the country road, not saying a word at first, but finally he says, still dreamy:

"So you're Will Bruce's daughter! Well, well!"

"Oh, did you know my dad?" I asks, forgetting to be haughty.

"I've heard lots about him," he answers, "since I came here to work. Folks seems to be sort o' divided in their opinions about the way he left here."

"They were probably glad to dig up the old gossip for you," I says. "I'll bet it didn't lose nothing in the telling, either!"

"No, I guess you're right about that,"

he says, and laughs. "But don't you remember your father at all?"

I told him I hadn't seen my dad since I was a little bit of a kid, and I had only an old photograph to remember him by—one mama gave me. He sort o' frowned at that, and slapped the reins at the horses and never said another word all during our drive.

That made me mad, him acting interested that way and then closing the conversation so abrupt. I hadn't started the personalities! So I took a good long look at him while he was staring out over the horses' heads, and, Ray, I sort o' felt in my bones he wasn't straight. I didn't dislike him, exactly, but I just had a feeling he was worth watching, so as not to let him get away with anything, if you get me.

After we jogged along another mile, both making a clam look like a monolog artist, we finally turned in at the front gate of the farm and drove up to the side porch. Gee, Ray, it looked so natural, I felt kind and loving to the whole world! Then grandma opened the door and saw me. And what do you suppose she says?

"Well!" she says. "So *you're* back!"

Of course I know the Scotch are supposed to be undemonstrative, but I think grandma carries it a little too far.

"Yes," I says, "I'm back—but just for a visit. I got homesick, I guess, grandma."

"Well, get down and come in wi' yourself," she says. "I happened to straighten up your room to-day, so you'll find it ready for ye."

Say, listen, Ray, you got no idea how good that room looked to me, with the clean white curtains blowing in the lake breeze, just the way I'd imagined it so often, and the four-poster bed with the old blue cover and all! I didn't know how much I had missed it until I got back to it. I was ready to turn on the weeps again when grandma called me to supper, and I ran down the back stairs that leads just off from my room down into the kitchen.

The table was set there. Grandma don't believe in eating in the dining-room except on grand occasions, like funerals, and naturally she couldn't be expected to make much fuss over a granddaughter, more or less. You'd 'a' thought I had never been away at all, the way she acted. I was beginning to think I had only dreamed about the city.

And then the new hired man came in and sat down opposite me, and I realized that things was different. It all looked the same, but somehow it *felt* different, if you know what I mean. It was sort o' psychic, if you get me.

The red table-cloth and the lamp and the hot biscuits was there, and even the peach preserves, but I missed something. It didn't seem natural. For one thing, grandma hadn't said a cross word since I came, and if she'd been anybody else, I'd 'a' said she was trying not to smile. And she seemed so mild! Why, when the hired man asked for more preserves, she got up and opened a new jar; and she isn't one to believe in pampering the flesh any.

After supper, when I offered to wash the dishes, she let me do them all, even her blue willow plates she sets such store by. Something was queer, but I couldn't quite make it out.

Then grandma and the hired man had a long talk together, all about sheep and tar-dip and lambs and turnips, and they got into a deep argument about rock salt, whatever that is. They talked back and forth, and forth and back, and I was getting terribly sleepy, but still I could see that Sam Jones—that was the hired man's name—never gave in to grandma once. He even laid down the law to her, and she seemed to like it.

Finally I couldn't hold my eyes open any longer, and I said good night and started up the back stairs to my room. Well, if the hired man didn't stop in the midst of a long spiel about shearing, and hand me a little bedroom lamp, all lighted, and say:

"Pleasant dreams, Miss Sarah!"

I was sure surprised. He wasn't fresh or anything, but his manners was altogether too good for a farm hand, and I made up my mind that I'd find out more about him.

But I fell asleep before I could figure out how he had got such an influence over grandma, and say, did I sleep? I never came to the surface till two o'clock the next afternoon, and grandma had let me sleep right through—hadn't even called me for breakfast.

But that didn't last long. After the first day I got right back into the old schedule, and it was lots nicer having Sam Jones there. I got up every morning at five, and ran out to the barn to watch Sam milk the cows. Then I helped him turn the separator, and all before breakfast!

Him and I got real well acquainted, and I couldn't help liking him, but still I thought he was a kind of a nut. We would be talking along so friendly when something that was said would seem to make him mad, and he'd walk away or change the subject. I couldn't make him out at all; but every day grandma seemed to depend on him more and more. I thought maybe she was getting kind o' childish.

III

AFTER I had been there a few days, Sam Jones sold the wool, and that afternoon he drove back to the farm in a new chummy roadster—a real little jazz buggy, with all the trimmings. He invited grandma and me to take a ride. Grandma put on her best bonnet, and we got in. First off we went pretty slow, but when we got into a good stretch of road, Sam says:

"I guess I'll let her out."

And he did! Grandma grabbed the side of the car and squeaked:

"Losh, mon, give me leave to catch my breath!"

So Sam slowed down again. After a while grandma let go the side of the car and settled back in her seat.

"What did ye do, laddy, to make it go so fast a while back?" she asked.

"Oh, I just gave her a little gas," Sam says.

We poked along some more—Sam explaining the working of the brakes to me.

"Well," grandma says, "what are you two clickety-clackin' so long aboot? Give her a little gas," she says.

From then on we hit up a good speed. Grandma's bonnet blew off, but she should care! She had the time of her young life that evening.

Of course it wasn't really any of my business, but the next day I asked Sam right out how it happened that he was spending grandma's money so free and easy. He only smiled and said she told him to spend it as he thought best; and when I asked grandma later, she told me the same thing. It looked queer, grandma being one of these thrifty kind that take an hour to decide how to spend a nickel, and then put it back in the old sock until they can give more time to it. I began to think he had her hypnotized.

A few days later, Sam took me for a drive — grandma said she was tired and wouldn't go—and we drove back into the woods to the little cottage dad had built for mama before things busted up. He had hoped that if he gave her a home of her own, and got her away from under grandma's thumb, maybe they could be happy there together; but it was too late. Mama couldn't see it at all—and that was another thing that made dad go away. I felt sorry for him, honest, and I told Sam Jones so when we got to talking about it. He gave me a funny look, and asked me how I liked the cottage.

"Oh, I've always liked it," I says. "It's so cute and little, it would be fun to fix it up. But mama just wasn't built that way. It was the bright lights for her. She was so pretty, you know," I says, "and naturally, she felt different."

"Well, aren't you pretty, too?" he asks, not a bit fresh, Ray—but what a nutty question!

"Why, of course," I says, "I don't think I'm any curly haired Mary, neither do I consider myself hopeless," I says. "I know my good points, and my bad ones don't keep me awake nights worrying about 'em; but I think I must be a jay at heart, if you get me. I love to fuss around a kitchen, and to watch things grow in a garden. I've tried the city," I says, "and I don't feel that I made any howling success there, either."

"Oh, you don't!" he says. "Why not?"

"No," I says, "I don't. I've figured out where I made a mistake rushing off to aunty's that way, instead of talking things over with grandma and persuading her to let me go to a good school somewhere and get some training for a regular job of some kind. Here I've spent four years of my life slaving away at a job that just allows me to eat and sleep and buy clothes—city clothes, that is. My one idea so far has been to earn enough money to get all dolled up like Astor's trick horse. Now if I had teased grandma to let me go to a good school, I'd 'a' met a different class of people. Not but what the girls at the emporium ain't a good straight, warm-hearted lot; but, between you and me, most of 'em haven't got an idea in their bean beyond working a few years and then getting married. I've seen the men they marry," I says, "and I couldn't picture myself tied to one of that kind. And yet I could go on as a stock clerk for twenty years and never progress, because I haven't got the push and brass that some of those other girls

have, that would make up for my lack of training. Why," I says, "the only job I can fill in the city is so small that they could get a green girl trained into it in a week! Maybe some day I might be put in charge of the stock-room, but the salary for that wouldn't bust the Rosenbachs' bank-roll. I got a swell future ahead of me," I says.

"Why don't you tell your grandma now how you feel about it?" he asks, real sympathetic.

"Well," I says, "if I wasn't so firm, and didn't hate so to give in, I would tell grandma how I feel, and maybe persuade her to let me go to an agricultural college. I'd like to go to the one that dad went to, and learn to be a farmerette and help her run the farm. I'd feel then that I was earning my board and keep; but that's just a pipe. I'll go back to the emporium next week, instead, and it ain't so bad, after all," I says. "I have good times, and after business hours nobody's my boss."

"Do you think that's such a good thing?" he asks. "Don't misunderstand me—I only wonder whether, living on your own as you do, you could take care of yourself. What sort of men do you play around with?" he blurts at me, real fierce.

"Say, listen, Mr. Jones," I says. "A girl living at aunty's boarding-house and working at the emporium gets to know men pretty well; and there's not many that I want to play with, either. Still and all, I've had several proposals," I told him—which is perfectly true, Ray, as you well know. "But the idea," I says, "of cooking three meals a day in a kitchenette don't appeal. Oh, no, it's so far away that I can't see it at all!"

"It's a relief to find you so sensible and wholesome," he says, "after the life you've been forced to lead."

"Well, thanks for those few kind words," I says; "but it seems to me that you belong to the working classes yourself; or did you forget that you was a farm hand?"

"I did forget it, Miss Sarah," he says earnestly, "and I beg your pardon. I sha'n't forget it again."

He burst out laughing and suggested that we should look through the cottage and decide how I would furnish it if it was mine.

Say, it was lots of fun, Ray, and we got into quite an argument over the floor coverings—he standing firm for carpets and me for old-fashioned rag rugs. Finally he had to admit that my idea was best, because the whole place ought to be old-fashioned to look right; but after I had got him to give in I was sorry, because there was something boyish about him that made you hate to disappoint him, even in a fool game like that.

I could see how easy he had gained a hold over grandma, 'cause, believe me, Ray, women are all alike when one of these regular heart-smashers comes along. I don't mean the handsome Harries, but the kind that look at you like a little boy that's been scolded. Young and old, we all fall for it, and I could feel myself slipping. I had almost forgotten that I didn't trust him.

But in a few days more, all my suspicions came back. I had gone to the post-office in town, and who should I bunk right into there but my old school-teacher, Miss Horton? She said she was just coming out to see me, as Charley Porter had spread the news of my arrival by that time, and everybody was anxious to see how Mrs. Bruce's wild granddaughter had turned out. Miss Horton is one of the kind that still wears black velvet stocks with bones in them, and holds her skirt up with both hands when she crosses the street, if you get me; but she's awfully kind, and although her ambition is to manage everybody else's business, her intentions are always for the best.

"My dear," she says to me, "how pretty you've grown!" Her stock went up with me right away, although I knew she was probably just leading up to something disagreeable. "I've been so proud of you," she went on, "when I heard what a successful young business woman you have become. And how pleased old Mrs. Bruce must be to have such a fine young woman for a granddaughter! My dear, I have been wanting to talk to you about your grandmother. I think you ought to know that people in Essex are talking about the way she allows that Sam Jones to manage her money and lay down the law to her generally."

"But, Miss Horton," I says, "people in Essex always have talked about grandma's ways, and it never has changed them yet, and never will. Besides," I says, "Mr. Jones seems to be a good business man, and grandma needs somebody to take the responsibility of the farm, now she's so old.

She can't get out and boss the job the way she used to."

"They say," Miss Horton whispered, not paying any attention to what I said, "that he never gets any mail at the post-office, and nobody knows who he is or where he comes from. He says he comes from up Canada way, but lots of escaped convicts cross the border. Why do you suppose he wears that beard?" she hissed. "And look at that automobile! Charley Porter saw the bill of lading for it, and he said it cost *thousands!* Your grandma never got any such sum as that for her wool—and Sam Jones paid cash for that car! Where did he get the money, I'd like to know? Do you suppose your grandma handed over her savings to him? My land, here comes the man now!"

Sure enough, Sam drove up to the post-office steps to take me back to the farm, and I hustled out and got into the car without saying a word. I couldn't have answered her questions, anyway, I felt so confused like, and my head was all in a whirl; but after we had drove a while, and Sam looked so happy and honest and all, I was ashamed of myself for paying any attention to her gossip, and sorry I had ever doubted him.

IV

Well, Ray, Thursday morning Sam Jones drove out alone in the new car without saying anything to grandma or me, and he never showed up again that day, or that night, or the next day! I was planning to leave Saturday, and I was wondering if I was going to see him again before I left. I was feeling kind o' hurt, and real worried, too—about the car, I mean. Grandma took it in such a funny way—never said anything, and acted as if Sam Jones and the car had never existed. Finally, Friday evening, I asked her where Sam had gone.

"He didn't tell me," she says, and looked as if that settled it.

"But, grandma," I says, "what do you suppose he's doing with the car all this time?"

"Probably giving it gas," says grandma without a smile.

I saw I wasn't going to get any satisfaction as to the state of her feelings, so I quit asking questions and went to bed. I made up my mind grandma had seen the last of her car. Probably Sam Jones *was* an escaped convict or something, and he had just decided to go while the going was good. It made me feel sad, somehow, and I lay awake a long time wondering why it did.

I must 'a' dropped to sleep, because all of a sudden I was wide awake again and sitting up in bed listening for the noise that had woke me. I had an idea it was in the room below me—the dining-room.

I listened hard, my heart going whack-whack, and sure enough the noise came again. Somebody was walking around in the dining-room. It wasn't grandma, because I could hear her snoring away, gentle but convincing, in the bedroom next to mine. I had read about these lonely farm-houses where old women were murdered in their beds, and I felt that it was up to me to protect her.

So I slipped out o' bed, and while I didn't feel so scared, you understand, my knees shook on me something awful! I decided to steal down the back stairs barefooted, so's not to make any noise, and peek into the dining-room from the kitchen door.

Well, by the time I got down-stairs I was getting so interested that my heart began to act natural again, instead of jumping from my neck to my feet at every sound. I tiptoed through the dark kitchen, praying I wouldn't knock any tin pans down to give me away, and I reached the door without making a sound. Peeking through, I could see a gleam of light from a dark lantern, and could make out what looked to be a heavy-built man opening the sideboard drawers real gentle and picking out the silver.

I watched him a while, not knowing just what to do. Then the light shifted, and I could see that the man had a beard. It came over me like a flash that it was Sam Jones robbing grandma of her old silver!

A shiver like a piece of ice sliding down my back went over me, and then I turned hot and mad to think that he would do such a thing. It wasn't enough that he had stole grandma's auto, but he must come back and finish the job by taking her old silver that she was so proud of!

I made up my mind that I would stay with him and get that silver if I could. There was only one weapon in the house, and that was one of grandpa's old Civil War pistols, at that moment lying under grandma's pillow, where she always kept it. I don't think she had ever used it, and

I didn't even know whether it was loaded or not, but I decided I'd take a chance on it. So I sneaked back up the stairs again and into grandma's room.

She was sleeping peacefully, and never even moved when I slipped the pistol out from under her pillow. Then down the stairs I tiptoed as fast as I dared, and looked in again through the dining-room door.

There he was, still picking over the silver, and occasionally he'd hum a few notes of a song under his breath. Of all the nerve! Gee, I was mad, Ray, to think of him singing while he helped himself. It was a bit thick!

I walked into the room with the pistol in my hand. I opened my mouth real wide, but no words came out. I swallowed hard, and finally managed to squeak out:

"Throw up your hands!"

Gee, Ray, you ought to 'a' seen him jump! He threw up his hands, too, when he caught sight of that pistol.

"My Lord, child," he says, "don't you dare to fool with that rusty old gun. It might go off!"

"Yes, and it will, too," I says, "if you don't put down that silver and get out of here! I don't want to wake grandma, because I don't want her to know the kind of a guy you are; but you gotta put down that silver and go!"

"You put down that old gun!" he says, and started to come toward me.

Then, Ray, I don't know just how it happened—I didn't mean to fire the thing at all, but all of a sudden it went off. It felt like a mule kicked me in the shoulder, and I saw several thousand stars and went to sleep.

V

THE next thing I knew I was lying on a soft, comfortable cloud, and somebody that sounded like grandma was saying:

"My own wee bairn! My brave girly, open your eyes and speak to granny! Now see what you've done with your crazy, meestifying scheme, Willy!"

Then I had it all figured out that I'd went to heaven, and grandma, hearing that gun go off, had probably died of the shock and gone with me. I could feel a bright light shining through my eyelids. They felt awful heavy, and I couldn't open them at first; but I did wanta see what heaven looked like, and I wondered who Willy was. So I managed to open my eyes and look round.

There I was, lying in my own bed in broad daylight. Grandma wasn't there at all, and I was looking up at Sam Jones, who was standing beside the bed and looking at me real anxious. My shoulder felt funny and heavy, and I could see it was all tied up in bandages.

"Hello, Sam!" I says, kind o' feeble. "Are you all here? Honest, I didn't mean to let that thing go off. What happened, anyway?"

He sort o' groaned.

"The d-damn thing exploded!"

"Yes, yes, go on," I says. "What happened next?"

"Well, it knocked your shoulder out of joint, and I thought you was killed," he blurts out.

He was almost crying. Imagine, Ray!

"Did it hurt you any—the gun, I mean?" I says.

"No, damn it!" he says. "I wish it had! Sarah," he says, real solemn, "I believe I am the biggest fool the Lord ever let live!"

"I don't get you at all," I says.

Then the truth came over me all of a sudden, and it made me feel kind o' wobbly inside, but awful happy. But before I could say a word, grandma came into the room, real brisk and efficient, to feed me some gruel she had made, and she ordered Sam out of the room.

"No more lollygaggin'," she says to me, "until you're stronger. Just you eat this parritch now, and go to sleep like a good child."

She tucked the covers around me real gentle and left me alone. So I went to sleep again, and I hardly felt the pain in my shoulder at all, I was so happy.

Well, the next time I opened my eyes it was evening, and the room was quite dim. I could just make out some one sitting by my bed. His face was turned away from me, but I knew who it was.

"Turn around, dad," I says, "and kiss your little girl!"

"Oh, Sarah, Sarah," he says, "and I thought I had lost you again!"

We had the best time crying over each other, and then dad told me the whole story.

It seems that dad was really badly hurt in that mine explosion up in the Klondike, but the man who was killed was a Polack

who was wearing an old suit of dad's that dad had given him. So when the searchers found his body they identified him as William Bruce from the name sewed in the coat, and sent word to grandma that her son had been killed. In the mean time, as they say, dad himself had been rushed with some of the other injured men to a hospital in a strange town. There he heard later that he was among those reported killed, and that his mother had been notified of his death.

He was feeling pretty blue and discouraged, and he decided to stay dead. He took another name — Sam Jones was the first one he thought of—and started life all over again. He let his beard grow while he was in the hospital, and it certainly changed his looks. After he got out of the hospital, he went back to the mining town to see if he would be recognized; but men that he had worked with every day for a year or more would pass him on the street and not one of them knew him.

Well, then he went to Nome, and his luck seemed to change. Everything he handled seemed to turn into money. He went into the fur trade and made money steadily, everybody buying furs as they never had before, and his Indian trappers always seeming to get the finest skins. For six years he went on that way, his luck never going back on him. Just piling up the money kept him interested for a long time; but when he finally had made a big success he felt like it wasn't doing him any good. He wanted to share it with his own people; but he was just too darned stubborn to go back and say he had been in the wrong.

Then one day he got hold of an old theatrical magazine, and there on the front page was the news of mama's death. He said he felt like a cur, having all that money, and poor mama dying off on the road in a country hotel with nobody to take care of her. He said he went out in a pine grove under the stars that night, and tried to tell her how sorry he was that he had left her and me in anger, and that he would try to make it up to her.

"And I believe she heard me," he said; "because I felt happy and at peace for the first time since I had left her!"

Well, the only thing he wanted to do then was to sell out and come back to the States and make a home for grandma and me where we could all be happy together. So he came right straight to the old farm first, and told grandma his name was Sam Jones, and asked her did she want a hired man. But gee, he couldn't fool her—she knew who he was the minute she saw him!

She was all for having him go right to New York and get me the very same day, but he coaxed her to try out his plan of surprising everybody; and so she was willing to let him pass as her hired man for a while. She was so glad to get him back, she would have cut her head off if he had asked her to, I guess.

And then I appeared unexpected and surprised them, instead. Meantime dad was planning his grand surprise, and had been going all over the country in the auto, buying up old furniture to put in the little cottage, which was to be all my very own. He had even sent back a lot of carpets he had ordered and had bought rag rugs instead, because I liked them better. By hustling he had got the house all ready to move into except for some old silver that grandma had told him he could have. So that's how it happened that he came over at night to get it, and I had to go and spoil it all with my movie hero-een stuff!

Say, Ray, it was funny, wasn't it, the way I happened to go to Essex just at that time? Dad said when he saw me waiting for him there at the dock, I looked so much like mama — my eyes and all — it pretty nearly knocked him over.

Another thing he told me was that grandma had missed me a lot and had kept my room just the way it was when I left it. She used to straighten it every day. Of course, being grandma, she hasn't never called me any pet names while she thought I was conscious and could hear her; but she has been awful good to me ever since I got hurt.

It took me a week to get well enough to travel, and say, I dreaded telling old Rosenbach that I was stealing out on him after him giving me that regular vacation and all. I didn't know what he'd think of me; but when dad and I walked in there this morning, and I told him the whole story, what do you think he said? He patted my arm real gentle, and he says to dad:

"I always said it. Such birdlings like this little one should be happier in the home nest—yes?"

Dad thinks he's a wonder!

Well, Ray, I'm off—buying curtains and cooking-dishes and everything! And I'm

going to have you girls up when the house is all settled, and we'll celebrate for fair.

Think of me keeping house! I've sure got lots to learn, and grandma's going to have a grand time teaching me. But honest, Ray, I don't feel as if I deserved it a bit. I get all choked up when I talk about it; but I gotta meet dad now, and when we get our shopping done, we're going to hurry back to Essex.

We want to see Charley Porter's face when he finds out who dad really is!

The Corner of Richman Street

THE STORY OF A COMPLETE REVERSAL OF THE SEESAW OF LIFE

By L. J. Beeston

LANDMARK stood under one of the trimmed holly-bushes, his eager and fascinated eyes fixed upon a rather curious sight.

There was a double row of hollies, shaped to pyramid form, between the gate of the suburban house and the lighted window upon which Landmark's gaze was bent. He stood there not merely because he did not wish to be seen, but because a deluge of rain was tumbling from the night sky, beating upon the ground with a seething hiss.

In the interior of the room, which was clearly revealed by the unshaded window, he could see a tall, slender man in evening dress, standing with his back to the fire. On a table in front of the man were three objects. These seemed to absorb his attention, making his eyes glow feverishly, and leaving him oblivious or disregardful of all else.

One of the articles was a ten-pound note; another was an unframed portrait of a woman; and the third was a revolver.

When the tall, slender man looked at the bank-note, it was as if it was the last he had in the world. And it *was* the last he had in the world.

When he turned his eyes from it to the portrait of the woman, the sternness in them faded and was replaced by an expression of love and longing.

When he glanced from the woman's face to the revolver, his jaw stiffened, although his cheek paled, and he drew a deep breath as if he would lift some terrible weight from his heart.

Under the holly, Landmark stooped and watched. He was trembling a little from excitement — an excitement not created wholly by the silent drama he was witnessing. This drama he translated rightly, for he was an intelligent and educated man.

"That fellow in there," he said to himself, "is facing ruin, the love of a woman, and the end of all things which a pistol ball in the brain brings."

He said that; but it did not explain all his interest. As a matter of fact, he wanted the ten-pound note.

He was thinly clothed, and the wet night air went to his bones. The rain made a tenuous veil between him and the window, and beat drearily upon the hard leaves of the hollies.

"I am down," Landmark went on, "but that chap is down and out. Yet he is wearing good clothes, and is obviously well-nourished. I haven't a shirt to my back, my shoes are letting in water, and hunger is gnawing my inside; but I do not want to shoot myself. Why, then, should he? It must be because there is something else —something worse than a back without a shirt, shoes with holes in them, and a stomach without food to put in it. Now what the devil is he going to do?"

The tall, slender man stepped to the table as if he had made up his mind. He pushed aside the ten-pound note disdainfully, took up the photograph, looked at the face as if it was heaven and eternal life, put it down, and lifted the revolver.

At that moment he seemed to hear a sound in the house which caught his atten-

tion, for his eyes, over which a strong flash of light had passed, suddenly sought the door of the room. For a moment he paused, frowning a little; then he put the revolver on the table again and moved to the door, which he opened.

"Now! It is my one chance!" panted Landmark.

The room was empty; the tall, slender man had gone out. The interloper ran forward, threw up the lower sash of the window, put a leg over the sill, and the next moment was in the room.

Half a dozen steps brought him to the table, and his red, numbed fingers closed upon the bank-note like a vulture's claws upon a savory scrap of food. He turned to bolt.

Suddenly he recoiled as a deafening crash rang in his ears.

By a mischance—unlucky for him—the sash-line of the window had chosen that moment to snap, so that the sash fell in its frame with a sound like a gun-shot. Landmark got back his wits before a fraction of a second had passed, leaped to the window, and tried to raise it again; but it was exceedingly heavy with no line to run on the wheel.

While he struggled, he heard a footstep behind him. The occupant of the room had returned, drawn back swiftly by the crash of sound.

Landmark spun round, a bitter curse falling from his lips. He dropped the ten-pound note and made a grab for the revolver, as being more useful to him in the exigency; but before he could make any menace with it the other man leaped forward. His left hand caught Landmark's right wrist in a grip of iron, and his right closed upon the intruder's throat.

Landmark was a man of powerful build, and the urge of desperation spurred him; but lack of nourishment had sapped his stamina. He tripped his adversary, and fell with him upon the deep-pile carpet; but that did not loosen the grip at his throat. Choked by it, his strength ebbed; he was flung over upon his back; the pistol fell from his hand; a great splash of red light swung before his eyes.

"I'm done! Don't kill me!" he gasped, drawing up his knees.

With a sense of overwhelming relief he felt the squeeze at his windpipe relaxed. A voice pierced his bewilderment.

"You spoke just in time. Get up!"

Landmark reeled to his feet. He was badly shaken.

"What brought you here?" the other man inquired grimly, pocketing the undischarged revolver.

Landmark felt his wrenched throat.

"That brought me here," he answered, pointing to the crumpled note that lay on the carpet.

"How—ah, you were watching me through the window?"

"Yes."

"And you were prepared to face prison for the sake of a paltry ten-pound note?"

"I didn't think of the prison."

"No, I suppose not. You couldn't have. If it had been fifty thousand, now—"

"You might let me go!" Landmark blurted.

"Why?"

"It can't matter much to you—just now—what happens to me, can it?"

The other stared at him gloomily.

"I understand. You have been putting certain constructions on what you saw. No, I care not a curse what happens to you. You are a bungler; there is little of the artist in your methods. Have you tried this sort of thing before?"

"I have not."

"I can believe that. I see! That coat—those shoes—you are out for the primal necessities. You speak well. Where were you educated?"

"Winchester and Trinity, Cambridge."

"All right! You can get out."

Scarcely believing his ears, Landmark turned to make a speedy exit.

"Stop! You are forgetting the ten-pound note, I give it to you."

Landmark faced round.

"You mean it?" he demanded savagely.

"I do. Oh, the note's all right! You needn't be afraid to change it. I give it to you because—because I have no further need of it."

Landmark did not care to argue or ask further questions. He crushed the note in his palm and left the room by the way in which he had entered. He took six steps toward the street, and then, for some reason—possibly to convince himself that he was not dreaming—he stopped and looked back.

What he saw numbed him as if his limbs had been touched with paralysis.

Through the doorway of the well-lighted room a second person had entered—a

squat-built man wearing a blue serge reefer coat and a badly fitting bowler hat. The tall, slender man was facing this newcomer. His cheeks were bloodless as marble, and as he looked at the other he slowly raised his pistol to the level of his own right temple. Only a second of time was between him and no time at all.

The squat-built man did not move an inch; but he called out, in a voice which had the lash of a whip:

"Put that down!"

The other obeyed, abruptly cowed.

"That is sensible," said the intruder. "Now, Wellman, you know what I have come for?"

"Yes."

"You will make no fuss?"

"No."

"Come along, then!"

Landmark saw and understood. Suddenly he was very much afraid, so that his teeth rattled together. He had never seen a man arrested before; he had never seen any one dragged under in that fashion.

II

THREE years later Arthur Bascombe Wellman emerged from prison.

With amazed eyes and uplifted palms the world—his world—had seen the well-known financier go into eclipse. The astonishing news made big head-lines in the newspapers, which announced that Arthur Bascombe Wellman had been arrested overnight in his own house by Inspector Redding, on a charge of appropriating funds. The trial followed. It was thought by many that he had been victimized by a partner; but whether victimized or not, he was sent to Irons prison for three years.

Every one knew when he went in; no one cared to know when he came out.

At about eight o'clock one night, a week later, Wellman entered the single furnished room which he had taken in a more than shabby street off the Charing Cross Road. He lighted the candle in a broken china holder on the table. The miserable gleam flickered on the poor environment about it. The man who had been accustomed, before the blow, to every comfort and a good deal of luxury, turned his haggard eyes to right and left, and stifled a groan which his very heart sent up.

He then perceived that a letter had been pushed underneath his door before his return to the room.

A first glance showed him his own name upon the envelope; a second that the little wrapper was not fastened; a third that it had been delivered by hand. It contained the following simple message:

> If Arthur Wellman is in need of a good meal, he will be at the west corner of Richman Street, where it turns into Portland Square, at ten o'clock precisely.

So Wellman read. It had a queerish sound, this invitation. When a man is asked to a supper, he is not generally requested to wait at a street-corner. Wellman conjectured that one of his former friends must have seen him, and, from a motive of compassion, had so requested him to call, though in a rather unconventional way.

He put on his hat and went out. He did not even hesitate. How could he, when he had not had a decent meal for a week? The primal urge of absolute hunger sweeps aside any delicate considerations.

He was at the spot fifteen minutes before the time named. It was a November night, with a thin fog and a drizzle of rain, and he shivered with cold. He kept looking about him, but the few people who passed paid no regard to him.

He soon turned his attention upon the house at the corner. At once his notice was chained by a partly open window on the ground floor, through which poured a flood of light. He saw a dining-room with solid furniture, water-colors in gilt frames, and upon a table an untouched cold supper with a setting of silver and crystal, and red wine in decanters.

The thought that here was his promised meal flitted through Wellman's brain. Absurd! He dismissed the idea.

All the same, the sight of those desirable things, of that interior comfort barred from him by a mere window, began to fret his nerves. And the window was a little open, with only a brass hand-rail between it and the front steps of the house.

A flush began to dye Wellman's cheeks, and he deliberately turned his back upon the inviting scene. He had not come down to that, thank God! He had never been a sneak-thief, at any rate.

The thought of the temptation made him look stealthily about him. At a distance of a few yards a man was watching him. As Wellman peered forward, it seemed to him that the still figure was that of a squat-

built man wearing a reefer-cut coat and a bowler hat tilted over one eye.

That form! Memory of it was seared into his brain!

Wellman shrank back and flattened himself against the railings. Thank Heaven that he had not even toyed with the temptation upon which he had just turned his back!

Possibly, however, his brain, weary and ill-nourished, had tricked him by a fantasy. Possibly he would have imagined the face of the detective upon any pair of shoulders at such a moment. That was true, he felt; but he would linger no longer. He had had enough of this waiting, and he swung upon his heel to go away.

At that instant the door of the house behind him opened, and a man servant ran down the steps.

"Excuse me," he called out quickly. "Are you Mr. Wellman?"

"I am."

"Then will you please come inside?"

The other obeyed, and was shown into the dining-room which he had viewed from a more comfortless angle. The servant drew the curtains, stirred the fire to a fine blaze, and went out without speaking a single word.

Wellman looked at the closed door. It was all very strange. He warmed his chilled hands before the fire and continued his vigil, certain that some one would appear; but no one came.

The house was very silent. Wellman's eyes kept seeking the table, with its most inviting meal. Surely it was to this that he had been asked! He kept looking at the good things on the spotless table linen, and resolution to do nothing gradually ebbed.

Perhaps he was expected to help himself. In that case he was surely wasting time. It was an argument which the gnaw of increasing hunger was not slow to reenforce. He waited ten minutes longer, and, no one appearing, he finally drew up a chair and made a start.

The moment he began to taste the food all doubts whether he ought to do so vanished; but when he had made a hearty meal, when he surveyed the wreckage, and the thing was done, he experienced returning qualms of conscience. However, it could not be helped now; so to clinch matters he helped himself to a couple of glasses of red Burgundy.

Warmed through and through, he felt decidedly better. Only one thing was lacking—a thing that he had not enjoyed for three sad years. It was a good cigar.

No good stopping now! He looked about him, and, sure enough, there was an open box of Havanas on top of a revolving book-case. He rose from his chair and stepped toward it.

When he reached the book-case, his outstretched hand became fixed as if paralyzed. By the side of the box of cigars were three other objects. One was a ten-pound bank-note; the second a revolver; and the third the unframed portrait of the woman he had loved—and lost.

Back from the past—a past which seemed sundered from the present by an eternity—floated to Wellman memory of a night when he had stood and regarded, with weighted heart and darkened eyes, his last ten-pound note, and the picture of the lost one, and the blued-steel instrument of swift death. Recollection furnished a vivid photograph of the incident, but that did not assist his groping wonder in the mystery before him. He stood and stared, utterly lost.

III

"LIFE, my friend, is a queer seesaw," said a quiet voice.

Wellman spun round, taken by surprise, and looked into the smiling eyes of a young man about five years his junior. It was a good-looking face, strong and cultured, and the evening dress that its owner was wearing set off to advantage his broad shoulders and athletic frame.

"First one is up, and the other is down; and then the other rises and the first descends," continued the newcomer. "Does not that help you to identify me? I placed those articles on the book-case in order that you might hazard a guess. Come, do you not remember?"

Wellman struggled, but shook his head.

"I was the last visitor you received before—before you went under," explained his interlocutor, the smile lingering in his eyes. "An unexpected, an uninvited guest. We had a bit of a scrap, I believe, for that ten-pound note which you—"

"Ah, I place you now!" interrupted Wellman, much surprised.

"I came in and helped myself without being asked; and—pardon a mere jest—it is what you appear to have done, likewise.

Don't look embarrassed, man! It is your end of the seesaw, that is all."

"You—you sent me a letter?" faltered Wellman.

"Yes, and I expected you to come."

Suddenly an idea sent a painful flush to Wellman's cheeks. Had he been asked to wait outside the house in order that he might be tempted to enter without ceremony? The flush revealed his thought.

"I admit that that was my notion," explained the other apologetically. "I wanted to complete the reversal of what occurred at our first meeting. I see now that it was rather brutal of me, and I ask your forgiveness. Allow me to introduce myself. My name is Landmark. Pray be seated—here, by the fire. I am glad to see you, Wellman. I took a keen pleasure in arranging this meeting, which I wanted to be as dramatic as possible. Take a cigar. I have only nice things to say to you."

Landmark himself lighted one. When he had seen his visitor comfortable he went on complacently:

"My servant tells me that you were out when he called, and that he put my letter on your table."

"Under the door."

"Much the same thing. For an entire year I have been waiting for you to be set at liberty, in order that I might thank you in a substantial manner."

"Thank me?"

"I can never do so enough."

"What for?"

"You might have sent me to prison. Instead, you gave me ten pounds and my liberty."

Wellman smiled faintly.

"I do not remember giving you the money."

"No? I can understand your forgetting details at such a moment as that; but you did. It was the turning-point in my life. Those ten sovereigns laid the foundation of my present wealth. Two years later I found myself a rich man. I am rich now—very rich."

"Ah!" sighed Wellman.

"And I am going to pay you interest on your money."

"Interest on ten pounds, for three years?"

Wellman's smile deepened. He drew with keen enjoyment on his cigar. How nice it was in this warm, well-furnished room! He had once owned such comfort himself; and this well-dressed man who sat opposite to him had come to him driven by the sharp urge of want. Truly, life was a seesaw!

"It does not sound much," answered Landmark. "If we look at it commercially, it would mean but a few shillings; but I do not regard it that way at all. I consider that you have been responsible for all my good fortune, and you shall be recompensed accordingly. You shall not leave this room, Wellman, without a check in your pocket. More, I need your brains. The world knew what they were before you made a false step. Three years of hard luck cannot have killed them. My prosperity is not so great but that it may be doubled—trebled; and you shall come in with me and help me do it!"

The words quickened Wellman's heart, sending a glow of pleasure to his worn cheeks and haggard eyes.

"You are very good," he said simply. "I must esteem myself very fortunate."

"I am hoping you will repeat that remark—when I have finished."

Landmark climbed out of his chair and stood with his back to the fireplace.

"The seesaw on which we find ourselves," he continued, "is more complete than you suppose. When you were in my position, you loved a woman. Well, now that I am where you were, I, too, love a woman."

"But not the same," sighed Wellman.

"Yes, the same."

Wellman started. All at once a tingle of hostility ran in his veins.

"It is easily explained," went on the other. "Wishing to do you a good turn when you had been sentenced and I was prospering, I inquired into the facts of your life, to see if I could help any one who had been dependent upon you. That was how I came to meet—the original of that photograph there. Oh, she did not need help—I am aware of that; but, as I say, I got to know her, and then I began to love her. I hide nothing from you. I say that she who loves you still is the one woman in the world for me."

Wellman tossed aside his cigar and waited, ill at ease.

"Yes, I will be candid," continued Landmark determinedly. "She loves you still, Wellman. I know that she has made advances to you since you came out from Irons. I know that you have kept away—

because you feel, I suppose, that shame for the past puts an insuperable barrier between you and her; but whenever you choose to go to her she will offer you welcome, forgiveness, happiness."

Wellman's chest rose and fell. He groaned and clinched his hands.

"But if you do *not* go," went on Landmark, almost fiercely, "I shall have a chance. The question is, will you, or will you not?"

Wellman drew a deep breath.

"Is your promised help to me conditional on my answer?" he asked.

"I mean to give you five hundred pounds whatever that answer may be; but if you assert, in the most explicit and final fashion, that you feel you never can seek that lady again, then I shall ask you to accept five thousand."

Wellman got up instantly.

"No, by God!" he said vehemently. "I can never sell her affections in that way! I do not want your money; I do not want your five hundred. Whatever I may do is my business—and hers!"

"You definitely decline my offer?"

"I must."

"You will admit that I have been frank?"

"Yes, I admit that."

"I have been more—much more. By assuring you that she loves and wants you still, I may have killed my own chances."

"I cannot help that."

"No, you could not. Sit down, I pray. Do not go yet. Well, I have spoken of one matter, and I have had the worst of it. We will forget it. There remains another for discussion. I will not press any ready money upon you, since you are inclined to regard it in the way you do; but my offer to take you into partnership remains open, and is unprejudiced by any condition at all. I repeat that I need your brains, Wellman. You possess in them an asset which I must call mine!"

The speaker's voice had changed. It had become stern and authoritative. The word "must" had been shot out with vehemence. Wellman considered and remained silent.

"I may count upon you, then?" insisted Landmark.

"You are forgetting one thing."

"And that is?"

"That my name no longer carries weight in the world of business and finance. It was once a high guarantee; it is now—what you know it to be."

"True; but it is not your name I need, but your experience. Come, I think we understand each other?"

"I understand—now," replied Wellman gloomily. "And I say no. I have had three years of it."

"And they have beaten you—*you?*"

"Possibly. Who knows? You talked of being frank. Tell me, are you offering me the straight or the crooked?"

"We will make it seem straight. Will that answer do?"

Wellman shook his head.

"I might have known!" he muttered.

"Known what?" demanded Landmark sharply.

Wellman glanced round the richly furnished room expressively.

"Remember in what circumstances you forced yourself on my notice," said he. "And now I find—these sure symptoms of money. You have not changed your methods; you are but flying in much higher circles."

"Damn your criticism!" retorted the other with a vicious snap of his jaws.

"Certainly I have small right to put them forward."

Wellman took up his hat.

"But wait—wait!" urged Landmark impatiently. "If you are afraid of the police, then you need not be. I will look after that."

"I don't know. I am discharged, but I shall be under surveillance. While waiting outside this house I was passed by a detective officer."

"Imagination!"

"I think not. I knew the man at once. It was Inspector Redding. It was he who arrested me. I have reason to remember that face!"

Wellman moved toward the door and opened it.

"Good night," he said curtly.

He was not answered, and he let himself out of the house. At the corner he paused. Where was he going? What did he mean to do?

A woman's name crept into his mind. Still was he loved and wanted. One of all the many he had known still remembered him, and more than remembered. He had but to go to her, and he would find the compassion and love for which he hungered and thirsted.

Well, he would go; he would put aside the shame which had stopped him; he would be happy once more!

IV

At that instant, as Wellman was about to turn, a slight sound drew his gaze to the ground-floor window of the house. Landmark had jerked aside the curtains and was looking out. For a few moments he stood immobile, then returned to the fireplace, his back to the blaze. He was clearly visible from outside, and Wellman, in the drizzle and fog, regarded him reflectively.

Between Landmark's eyes a frown of perplexity deepened. He was saying to himself:

"I reckoned upon Wellman. Damn his scruples! I am in a most awkward hole, and his brains could have got me out. Yet in one way I can give him points. When *he* made a false move, he allowed the police to see it. I am more wise to the danger of the game than he, and I fear nothing that way, thank God!"

He removed his cigar from his mouth, looked at it for a moment, and turned it about meditatively.

"*I* know how to throw dust in their eyes," he continued, muttering. "I soar too high in the blue to fear any swoop from the police. Now Wellman—by the way, it was queer that he was under observation outside my house. And then that letter which my servant delivered, and which he assured me he had placed on a table. Wellman said he found it under the door, which suggests that it might have been tampered with and read. I wish I had asked him if it was sealed, as when it left me. If I was nervous, I might imagine that I, and not he, am being watched, and my correspondence opened! I might even spoil my peace of mind by fancying that that detective brute was not hanging outside the house with an eye to Wellman, but that he meditates a pounce on me! That would indeed be a complete reversal of the seesaw—and damned strange, too!"

As he spoke, with a grim and skeptical smile, he mechanically lifted his gaze toward the door. The handle was turning—the door was opening!

Landmark stiffened to stone. He did not breathe.

On the threshold stood a man in a square-cut blue serge coat and a hard felt hat set at a rakish angle. Landmark knew him at once; he had seen him on one other occasion—just as Wellman, out in the night, rigid with a paralysis of emotion, was seeing him now.

Landmark uttered a snarling cry. Breaking the spell upon his senses, he leaped to the revolving book-case and snatched up the revolver. His cheeks were bloodless; and as he looked at the other, he slowly raised his pistol to the level of his own right temple. Only a second of time was between him and no time at all.

The officer called out, in a voice which had the lash of a whip:

"Put that down!"

Landmark obeyed the order, his fell purpose dissolved.

"That is better," said the detective. "Now, Landmark, I think you know what I have come for?"

Wellman waited to hear no more. He fled, with quaking heart and shaking knees.

OUTPOSTS

Life changes—only change abides. Youth goes,
Fair with its dreams, from childhood; its forays
Into the land of fancy cease, and days
Of sober effort their steep front oppose
Until at last the blackening shadows close,
And the sun sets, and sets with a false peace;
And the dark comes, whose rest is man's decease.

Yet here and there on the black front of night,
Like the far bivouac of a battled host,
The stars advance their distant points of light,
And God's immortal soldiers keep their post!

Harry Kemp

Not So Easy*

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE — THE ADVENTURES OF A BRAVE YOUNG MAN WHO UNDERTOOK TO TELL THE TRUTH

By William Slavens McNutt

AT ten o'clock on an evening in early May the New York City Hall Square stirred Clare Knowlton with a deep sense of the proximity of world power and romance. The Woolworth Building, its soaring, slender length exquisitely revealed in the glow of reflected light, reminded her of a bejeweled steel finger reaching experimentally skyward to prod the stars. It occurred to her that reaching for the stars was a natural effort for a structure rooted in a soil so rich and pregnant with startling progress as lower Manhattan.

On all sides the huge buildings of downtown New York — man-made mountain-ranges of steel and stone—were more felt than seen in the soft night. Clare thought of them as volcanic peaks, reared by human hands and daily active with human energy.

The day stunned her with the sheer volume of its activity, and the sharp details of that volume blurred her vision of its grandeur and romance. Only at night, in the deserted little park that was like a valley of silence in the midst of hills of muffled, pregnant sound, was she able to approximate a realization of the magnitude, potentiality, and romance of the daily pageant of which she was a professional observer and recorder. In the glare and bustle and roar of the day, history was made in the vast structures that surrounded her; in the muffled, rumbling mystery of the night it was balanced and written. Clare was proud of her little part in the writing.

As she stood in front of the City Hall steps, waiting, she was thrilled with the thought of the news from all the world flowing into the sparsely lit masses of stone and brick and steel that rose from Park Row. From the farthest corners of the world it came, from battle-line and council hall, from arctic outposts and jungle stations. Flashing swiftly in through the astounding length of impertinent cables that mock the depth and width of oceans, thrumming along thousands of miles of tiny, humming wire, even riding the empty air as swift and sure as an omnipotent spirit's thought, it came to its home of the written word in that dark mountain-range of buildings, and was hastily made into a mirror in which a hurried world at breakfast might casually glance and see its true reflection.

Clare was passionately glad to be a recording cog in one of the great machines that ground out the news. She loved the work, with its peculiar obligations and opportunities. She was in her early twenties, a trim, blond girl wholesomely intense and sparkling with enthusiasm. Her thoroughly feminine charm was, if anything, accentuated by a certain boyishness of thought and manner.

She had been waiting for perhaps fifteen minutes when she saw Jim Pickering approaching from the direction of Park Row.

Her pulse quickened as she watched him —a rugged, confident young fellow with a peculiarly proprietary air. Wherever he was, he always seemed to belong there. He could go farther without a police card or a press badge than any reporter in town.

"Sorry, Clare," he apologized, as he came near. "Been waiting long?"

"Just a few minutes," the girl answered, laying her hand on Pickering's arm and swinging happily into step beside him. "You all up?"

"At last," he said grouchily. "After I phoned you they stuck me for about a half-column of bla-a-ah on that pure milk thing

the Governor's pulling now to keep himself on the front page. Sickening bunk! What have you been doing?"

"Oh, Jim, I had a peach of a story to-day! A woman advertised for a home for her four-year-old girl; said she was a widow without resources, had been ill for a long time, and couldn't afford to keep the kid. I went up to see her this afternoon, and she told me her story. She married a young fellow out in Seattle in 1916. A week after they were married her husband's brother was killed on an American ship that was torpedoed by a German submarine. Her husband just saw red when he heard of it, gave his wife the few hundred he had saved, and enlisted with the Canadians. He was in France three months after he enlisted, and five months after he left home she got word of his death in battle. She was all alone there in Seattle, without money, and was expecting her baby; so she wrote to the only relative she had—an aunt here in New York. The aunt sent her money, and she came on here and lived with her until after the baby was born. Then the aunt died, and she was homeless again. She managed to live and keep her little girl by doing house-work until she was taken ill; but finally she gave it up and advertised for some one to adopt the child and give it a home. And, Jim, while I was up there talking to her, what do you think?"

"Long-lost father came in with a million in one hand and a limousine in the other, I suppose."

"Don't be a cynic, Jim! Her husband came in."

"Yeh? Which one?"

"The one that was killed. I mean—oh, you know what I mean. He hadn't been killed at all."

"Not at all?" Jim teased. "Not even a little bit?"

"You behave! I got it straight in my copy, and that's enough. He had been badly wounded, and was in the hospital for months. When he finally got back to Seattle, his wife was gone, and he couldn't find a trace of her. To-day he saw that advertisement in the paper, and while his wife was waiting for some one to come and adopt the little girl, he walked in on her. Jim, it was the most pathetic thing I ever saw. I—"

"Don't you ever get sick of writing that sob stuff?" he interrupted abruptly.

She did not answer. Jim stooped to look into her half-averted face and saw that her lower lip was quivering.

"Don't get sore, Clare," he begged, patting her shoulder. "I didn't mean to be rude. It just honestly amazes me that you can take such a keen interest in individual cases of suffering, when the whole world is so—"

"If you can interrupt me, I can interrupt you," Clare cut in. "If you're going to express one of your broad views of the world and what ails it, count me out."

"It's a bet," Jim said, laughing. "We'll just let humanity stew in its own misery, individually and *en masse*, while we go eat."

They stopped at the curb on Broadway, and Jim signaled a taxi.

"Where are we going?" Clare asked.

"Copper Tea-Kettle," Jim replied. "The gang is there."

"Let's go somewhere alone to-night, Jim," she suggested, as he settled himself beside her in the taxi. "I don't feel like the Copper Tea-Kettle and the gang."

"I'd like to see Ned Eggleston," Jim demurred. "I phoned him I'd be there."

"Ned Eggleston! Is he back?"

"Got in to-day."

"When I'm charitable, I think Ned is a nut," Clare said hotly. "When I'm not charitable, I think he's a nasty little traitor. I'm not charitable to-night."

"Oh, Ned's all right. You must admit he's a brilliant fellow. You don't like him simply because he's so bitterly honest."

"Honest!" Clare exclaimed indignantly. "Is it honesty to damn everything indiscriminately just because it exists? Is it honesty to sneer at every quality of loyalty and love? Is it honesty to ridicule every one of life's enthusiasms except the passion for hate and destruction?"

"Oh, it isn't that bad, Clare," Pickering insisted. "Ned despises all forms of sham and bunk—that's all."

"Yes, and according to him everything that any decent person cares anything about is sham or bunk," Clare retorted. "It makes me wild, the way he patronizes you and pretends to pity you. The trouble with him is that he's jealous because you've got a good job on a real paper, while the best he can do is to write rot for a few little fly-by-night sheets that are never more than a legal technicality ahead of the postal laws."

"I'm jealous of him, Clare," Pickering contradicted her moodily. "He's got the

courage of his convictions. He's got nerve enough to be honest. I haven't."

"Oh, Jim, stop it!" Clare pleaded. "Eggleston thinks being honest is expressing his private opinion of everybody and everything. Can't you see what a ridiculous egotist he is? The best thought of the best minds for thousands of years has gone into the making of our civilization, and he thinks—actually believes—that if he could just make things over in a twinkling according to his own ideas, he could create a perfect world. He isn't man enough to play his part in the world as it is, so he just sits aside and sneers at everything and pretends to pity those who won't sit and sneer with him. Don't let him fool you, Jim!"

Pickering laughed indulgently and patted her hand.

"All right, girly," he promised mockingly. "I'll be on my guard ag'in' the derned critter. I do feel that I ought to see him to-night, though. His father died a few weeks ago out in Illinois, and he—"

"Oh! I'm sorry, Jim. I didn't know."

"Ned's been back home settling things up, and he got back to-day. He's anxious to see me about something, so if you don't mind—"

"Not a bit, Jim," Clare said generously. "I didn't know you wanted particularly to see him to-night, and I—I thought it would be nice if we—just you and I—alone somewhere—"

"Goose!" Jim chuckled happily and kissed her.

II

THE Copper Tea-Kettle is a restaurant. It is called the Copper Tea-Kettle because it is not called the Pink Mouse or the Tin Stew-Pan or something else equally meaningless. It is run by a painter who can't paint and largely patronized by writers who can't write. The regulars who use it as a hang-out consider it the heart of Greenwich Village—in which belief they run true to type, in being absolutely wrong. It isn't the heart; it's a pimple.

The restaurant is one basement room and a kitchen in an old brick house on a sordid thoroughfare near Eighth Street and Sixth Avenue. An old copper tea-kettle hangs outside above the entrance. Maybe some one knows why. I don't.

On the walls of the restaurant are grotesque figures badly drawn and done in raw, clashing colors. A five-year-old subnormal boy with a deceased imagination trying to do his best with a whitewash brush and a bucket of house paint would probably achieve something approximately equivalent. If you visit the Copper Tea-Kettle and do not admire them, you are old-fashioned, pharisaical, lacking in appreciation. If you are without the pale, you are lucky; if you are within, you are a nut, so it doesn't matter anyhow.

The late Colonel Roosevelt once characterized the mad minority that attaches itself to all liberal political movements as "the lunatic fringe." The habitués of the Copper Tea-Kettle are elements of the inevitable lunatic fringe of progressive modern letters, art, and political thought.

When Jim Pickering and Clare Knowlton entered the place, they found a dozen of the regulars awaiting them. There were four women with bobbed hair. Now there is nothing wrong with bobbed hair except the unfortunate fact that most women such as the four mentioned wear it. There was a fifth whose hair was not bobbed, but should have been. She had a typical bobbed-hair mind.

There were six men, all of them the useless remnants of more or less human material that might have been made into good shoe-clerks with the proper handling at the proper time. Some of them painted and some of them wrote. Whatever they did they did badly enough to be worse than the average failure, and so they were eligible as members of the regulars at the Copper Tea-Kettle.

They had an identical philosophy, which fundamentally was this—the world didn't like what they did, therefore the world was all wrong, and they were the only ones in it who were all right. Simple system for achieving success! If you make a mistake, stand on your head and cheer it. If the rest of the people in the world don't cheer with you, explain that it's because they haven't the sense to stand on their heads and view your work from that undeniably normal position.

Then there was Eggleston. Eggleston had the world on his mind. He was worried about the human race. Things didn't go to suit him, and he knew that unless they soon did so a crash was inevitable.

He was a slender little fellow with a thin, white face, deep-set dark eyes, and a mop of long black hair. He knew a lot about Russia and nothing about Babe Ruth, Chick Evans,

Jack Dempsey, or Mary Pickford. He was not interested in trivial things, and all things were trivial to him except his own ideas.

He greeted Pickering warmly, granting only a casual nod to Clare.

"I have news for you, Pickering," he said intensely, in a loud whisper that was not meant to withhold his words from the ears of the others. Whispering was simply one of his two habitual methods of talking. His other manner was passionate oratory. "Good news!" he repeated impressively. "Sit down."

Pickering and Clare sat down by one of the little tables in the smoky room. Eggleston struck a pose and lifted his hand as a signal for silence.

"I have a message for Comrade Pickering!" he announced dramatically, pulling out the oratorical stop and infusing a tremor of forensic thunder into his tone. "It is a message of freedom that I want you all to hear."

He paused for a moment, and, turning, addressed himself directly to Pickering.

"I bring you a rod to strike away the shackles that restrain your genius," he declared solemnly. "We know how your soul revolts from the slavish business of writing political lies for a capitalist newspaper. We know how you burn to write the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. I give you the opportunity!"

He brushed back his long black hair, and, leaning forward with a hand resting on the table, dropped his voice once more to a loud, conspiratory whisper.

"My father ran a newspaper, the *Herald*, in our little town—Lucifer, Illinois. As you know, he passed away recently. He was a good man, but he was hypnotized by the capitalist class, and under the spell of the existing order. He was not consciously dishonest, but he was nevertheless the tool of the interests. No matter! He is gone now, and the paper is mine. No! It was mine for a few brief weeks. It is mine no longer. It is yours, Pickering—yours!"

"What—what are you getting at?" Pickering stammered.

"It is yours," Eggleston reiterated. "All yours, as a vessel into which to pour the truth. I give you freedom, Pickering—freedom to write bravely as a man, instead of scribbling half-true platitudes as a slave. I give you the Lucifer *Herald* for two years, without conditions. You may use it as your conscience dictates. Whatever income there is from the paper during those two years you are to keep. If a fearless policy of truth-telling utterly wrecks the property within that period, you will hear no reproaches from me. I have had the contract drawn up giving you the paper without conditions for two years. Pickering—comrade—I congratulate you!"

He clasped Pickering's hand and shook it enthusiastically. Pickering's expression was one of bewildered vacuity. The others in the room cheered and clapped their hands—all except Clare. She leaned forward and spoke to Eggleston in a distinctly antagonistic tone.

"Why don't you keep the Lucifer *Herald* and write the truth yourself?" she asked.

Eggleston's features expanded into a smile that expressed patronizing patience mingled with just a trifle of sadness at the thought that any one should insinuate a doubt as to his motive—for the tone of Clare's interrogation showed that she doubted him.

"My dear child, I haven't the technical knowledge to run the paper," he explained. "Besides, I have a larger field for expression in my writing for the liberal national publications that are lighting the true way through the darkness to the light."

He evidently intended and expected to squelch the impertinent girl with his gently superior manner; but she was not in the least intimidated.

"Just how much money did the Lucifer *Herald* make last year?" she demanded. Eggleston stopped shaking Pickering's hand. He drew himself erect, and his features contracted into an expression of offended dignity.

"I haven't the exact figures in mind," he said coldly. "Of course, if one thinks only in terms of money, one should curry favor with the capitalist class and shudder at the thought of speaking truth. If Mr. Pickering wants to continue to sell himself merely for money—"

"No, I don't!" Pickering shouted, starting to his feet. "The opportunity you offer me is just the thing I've been longing for. It's mighty fine of you, Eggleston, and I accept!"

"Just a minute, Jim," Clare interposed firmly. There was a high color in her cheeks, and her chin had a stubborn set. "I want you to know just what you are doing before you go on with this. You can take this new job if you like; but if you

do, you can find another girl to wear your ring."

"Clare!" Pickering exclaimed. "This isn't the place to talk about that."

"We're going to talk about it, though," Clare insisted stubbornly. "If you take this job, it's all off between you and me."

"You desert me for trying to be true to my ideals?" Pickering asked.

"No," Clare retorted. "I'd desert you for trying to put into practise the silly rot that these foolish friends of yours only preach. If you are really in earnest about making a sacrifice for an honest ideal, I'd go with you to the end of the world; but you're not. You've been feeding your vanity by letting these friends of yours make a mock martyr out of you. You rave about not being able to tell the truth. You don't want to tell the truth. You're a good reporter on a good newspaper, and you want to quit that to be a biased editorial writer on a measly little no-good paper in a little no-account town. Will you let one of your reporters write his own personal opinion of the truth when you get to running that paper? You know you won't. And yet you're mad just because you can't write your own opinions regardless. No, Jim—not for me! I love this town, and I love the big-time game. If you're going to desert both just for the sake of a false ideal, you're going to desert me at the same time!"

Eggleston smiled disdainfully.

"It's the same old story," he said with a note of weary contempt in his voice. "The world would be full of honest and courageous men if it wasn't full of men who are dishonest and cowardly for the sake of jobs and dollars to please their women. Forget it, Pickering. Knowing you were engaged to Miss Knowlton, I should have had better sense than to make the offer."

Pickering's eyes narrowed, and the lines about his mouth grew tense.

"I won't forget it," he said doggedly, looking intently at Clare. "I have accepted your offer. It goes!"

Clare returned Pickering's gaze steadily for a long half-minute, and then a faint, tired smile moved her lips. She deliberately stripped off her engagement ring, tossed it upon the table, and walked quickly out of the place.

III

PICKERING sat in the dingy little editorial office of the Lucifer *Herald*, studying the first page of the first issue of the paper printed under his management. If the sole function of a newspaper front page is to attract attention, the first page of the sheet which Pickering held in his fingers was a success. The principal head-line, set in huge black letters, read thus:

STOP, THIEF! STOP, THIEF!

A second deck, set in only slightly smaller type, informed whatever portion of the world's peoples might read it:

That is what the Lucifer *Herald* is going to do from now on. It is going to stop thieves and grafters from working in the safety of darkness created by special privilege. It is going to tell the truth about everybody and everything in this town just as fast and as fully as the absolute truth can be determined. The *Herald* has no principles, policies, or politics except such as may be included in its firm determination to search for the truth about everything and everybody and reveal it as fast as found. It wants no friends save those who love the truth and nothing but the truth, and fears no enemies it may make by exposing sham, falsehood, graft, and injustice of every kind.

The office-boy opened the door and thrust in his tousled head.

"Here's Mr. Jones wants to see ya," he announced.

Mr. Jones entered as an echo to Pickering's order that he should be shown in. He was a tall, loose-jointed man who gave one the impression of having been rather carelessly woven together out of odd sizes and lengths of weather-worn ropes which had unraveled and frayed near the top to form a ragged and stained beard.

Mr. Jones had a long and bony nose, which was considerably bow-legged, so to speak. It was Roman to the point of appearing much like a big, beckoning finger turned upside down and glued to the leathery face between the high, narrow forehead and the thin, wide mouth, which drooped at the corners to form a habitual sneer. His clothes gave evidence that he was either wealthy enough to afford being dressed like a tramp or too poor to afford being dressed any other way. He carried a copy of the *Herald* in his hand.

"You the new editor?" he asked in a voice that sounded as if it had been distilled from vinegar and aged in brass.

Pickering replied with a nod.

"Been readin' your piece in the paper this mornin' 'bout tellin' the truth," Mr. Jones continued, giving his nondescript

trousers a hitch with his left hand and spraying a thin, accurate stream of tobacco-juice over the crumbled contents of Pickering's waste-paper basket. "Time somebody besides me told the truth in this derned town! You mean what you say here in the paper—that you're goin' to tell the truth 'bout everybody, come what may?"

"I certainly do," Pickering assured him.

"That's talkin'!" Mr. Jones exclaimed in emphatic approval, slapping the palms of his knotty hands together and moving his long, thin head in a series of jerky nods. "Ole man Eggleston, that run this paper before you, he was scared to so much as print that it was daylight at noon, 'less'n he could get some prominent feller to say so an' then go an' print that he said it. Now you look to me's if you had somep'n up an' down the middle o' your back besides a wet rag that would wilt an' curl up if anybody looked you in the eye an' spoke out loud. You want to tell the truth, an', sir, I'm here to give you some truth to tell."

"Shoot!" Pickering invited.

"Well, sir, I got a farm right south o' town here, an' there's a squashed-down tub o' two-legged tallow owns the place right next to me that there ought to be some truth told about, an' I'm here to give it to you so you can tell it. His name is Jason Smithers, an' if you want to print some truth in your paper like you say, you just print it that he's a liar an' a cheat an' a all-round, no-good, low-down loafer. Yes, an' you can say in it that he's cruel to his animals, an' don't give his stock enough to eat ever, an' makes his wife work like a dawg, an' don't never give her no spendin' money, or buy her a new dress, or take her any place or nothin'. You can put that in—it's all true."

Pickering grinned and shook his head.

"That may all be true, as you tell me, Mr. Jones," he said; "but we can't print it. Why, if we did—"

"Can't, hey?" Mr. Jones interrupted belligerently, his small light blue eyes growing bright and hard with anger, and his ragged beard moving like the seeded top of a late fall weed in a gusty wind, as his jaws worked excitedly on his quid. "Why can't you, I want to know? You print it in your paper that you're goin' to tell the truth 'bout everything an' everybody, an' when I bring you in some truth to tell, you say you can't print it. Why not?"

"Why, that would be libelous," Pickering explained. "If I were to print that, any jury in the world would give Smithers the roof from over my head without ever leaving their seats!"

"But you printed it here in your paper that you was goin' to print the truth an' the whole truth, an' what I'm tellin' you about Smithers is true," Jones argued.

"It may be true," Pickering admitted; "but I have only your word for that, and even if you were right about it—"

"You ain't meanin' to call me a liar, are you?" Jones asked angrily, half rising from his chair.

"Certainly not," Pickering assured him pacifically. "I have no reason to doubt your word, but on the other hand I have no reason to trust it. I never met you before. And even if what you say about Smithers is true, I couldn't print it because—"

The verbal eruption of the emotional volcano that had been rapidly coming to life in Jones prevented further explanation.

"Well, if you ain't callin' me a liar, I'm callin' you one!" he shouted.

"You print it in your paper that you're goin' to tell the truth, come what may, just as fast as you find it, an' when I tell you some truth to print, you prove yourself a derned liar by tellin' me flat out you won't do what you said you was goin' to do! Old man Eggleston was bad enough, but you're a derned sight worse! He was honester'n you be, 'cause he never pretended to tell all the truth he knowed, an' you do. I been takin' this paper for twenty year, even though I knowed it never was no good; but not no more! I wouldn't have it inside o' my house again if you paid me for to take it—no, sir! You're a plain out liar an' a cheat, young man! That's what you are, an' I'm goin' to ask my lawyer if you ain't gettin' money under false pretenses, p'tendin' to be goin' to do what you tell out o' your own mouth you don' dast do! I'm goin' to have the law on you, young man! I'm goin' to see if—"

Pickering jumped up and moved quickly around from behind his desk to a strategic position from which his clenched fist, properly manipulated, might be landed upon the point of Jones's jaw, wagging rapidly behind its thick barricade of frowzy beard.

"Just about one more whisper out of you, you slander-mongering old fuss-foot, and you're going to see a lot of stars that the

astronomers haven't got listed yet!" he warned the indignant subscriber. "You get out of this office quick, or I'll give you some help that 'll hurt!"

"You threatenin' me, you young desperader?" the old man squealed, backing away with his long arms crisscrossed in front of his face in a comical posture of what he conceived to be defense against a possible fistic assault. "Just you hit me once, an' I'll have the law on you, I will! Just you hit me once, an'—"

"If I hit you at all, it 'll be a lot more than just once," Pickering assured him grimly. "Now you get out of this office, or I'll give you something worth going to see a lawyer about!"

An ominous movement of Pickering's right fist was productive of a certain nervous haste on Mr. Jones's part, which robbed his exit of dignity. There was no hesitancy about his going, but he left promising shrilly to return and to bring with him every legal and protective authority of the nation, short of the chief of the Department of Justice and head of the United States Army.

He had not been gone more than two minutes when the office-boy announced another visitor. The second caller was a fat, short, bow-legged man with a face that resembled a ripe tomato in color and an inverted eggplant in contour. The fleshy and bony material that might have gone into the making of a massive Websterian head seemed to have slipped and run all to jowls and jaw. Such of the bone as had not slipped remained atop as the major component part of a small, ape-shaped head sparsely adorned with a dusty-looking fuzz of dingy gray hair. His eyes were the color of soiled silver, mean and small, and set close together.

"My name's Jason Smithers," he admitted shamelessly, in a high, thin voice. "I was readin' in your paper this mornin' how you was goin' to print the truth about everybody, an' I jes' come right in to tell you some that had ought to be printed. I got a farm right out south o' town here, an' there's a whiskered ole polecat owns the place right next to me who—"

"I've heard of you, Mr. Smithers," Pickering interrupted him. "Mr. Jones just left a minute ago."

"Jones?" Smithers exclaimed. "Long feller with whiskers? Why, that's the ole scoundrel I come in to tell you about. He been in here lyin' about me?"

Pickering made a deliberately insulting appraisement of Smithers, eying his ugly person slowly from head to foot, and shook his head doubtfully.

"I'm not nearly so sure of that as I was before you came in," he admitted. "Mr. Jones was airing his personal opinion of you."

Smithers wiped what little there was of his forehead with his coat sleeve, and shook his head sadly, rendering an accompaniment to the movement by clicking his tongue rapidly against his teeth.

"Ain't that just like the unchristian ole whelp?" he murmured. "He up an' read that in your paper this mornin' where you printed it about how you was goin' to tell the truth about everybody, an' he come a runnin' right in to fill you up with a lot o' lies about me, in the hopes you'd print 'em 'fore you got a chance to find out they was lies. His doin' that shows you what kind of a man he is, now don't it? Cert'nly it does! An' now you jes' lis'en to me for a minute, an' I can tell you some truth about him that had ought to been printed long ago."

"The door's right behind you," Pickering quietly informed his visitor. "If you turn around, it will be right in front of you, and then, if you start running right away, and don't get your fat carcass stuck in it, you may perhaps be safe outside before I decide to comb your skull with this lead paper-weight!"

"Why—why, what you mad about?" Smithers spluttered. "Why, young man, just let me tell you—"

"Don't bother," Pickering advised. "I know it by heart. You're going to cancel your subscription to the *Herald*, and then you're going to see your lawyer and find out if you can take some legal action against me. If you don't get out of here and get quick, I'll give you something worth going to see a lawyer about!"

Pickering lifted the heavy paper-weight from his desk and balanced it in his hand suggestively. Mr. Smithers departed—hurriedly—declaring enmity and vowing vengeance.

"Damn!" Pickering swore to himself. "It's a shame that the libel laws won't permit me to print the real truth about both of them!"

He sighed wearily and began an unpleasing review of a mass of statistics. They comprised the accounts of the paper for

five years back, and each and every yearly statement showed a financial loss. As Pickering studied them for the hundredth time, he was conscious of an appreciable cooling of his gratitude for Eggleston's alleged generosity in giving him the paper for two years.

"He might have left out that bit about not reproaching me if a fearless policy of truth-telling utterly wrecked the property," he grumbled to himself, as he dug through the cheerless statements of receipts and expenses. "He might better have given me his sympathy along with the paper, instead of his congratulations."

After a time Pickering wearily thrust aside the depressing financial statements, lit a cigarette, and, drawing a small photograph of Clare Knowlton from his pocket, sat with his cheek in his palm and his elbow on the desk-top, sadly studying it.

The fire that warms the spirit of the reformer when the bleak winds of disapproval blow cold from the millions upon millions of chill, normal human natures who are satisfied—nay, anxious—to let pretty nearly good enough alone, was low in his heart. He had to blow upon the embers with the breath of his cherished philosophy to keep it alive at all.

"Ah, well!" he sighed to himself, as he returned the picture to its resting-place in his coat pocket. "One inevitably pays a price for the privilege of freedom, I suppose." Here he shut his teeth together hard and deliberately lied to himself to keep up his courage. "But it's worth it! To be free to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth—"

IV

THE door was violently flung open, and the *Herald's* one and only reporter dashed in, breathing hard and gripping a number of sheets of used copy-paper in one hand. He was a tow-haired, lank-built, floppy sort of lad just out of high school, abnormal in the development of his hands, his feet, and his capacity for excitement without the stimulus of legitimate provocation. He considered that being a reporter on the Lucifer *Herald* put him in the same class with successful, world-wandering soldiers of fortune and the leading literary lights of his time. He conceived his job to be both an art and an adventure, and as an artist and an adventurer he looked upon himself with a serious and somewhat awed eye.

"I've got a wonderful story for you here!" he disclosed excitedly. "I got all carried away while I was writing it. I got so kind of all worked up I hardly knew what I was doing!"

He handed the story to Pickering and drew a deep breath of satisfaction.

"Gee! It's great to be working on a paper where you can really cut loose and tell the truth!" he exulted. "While I was working for Eggleston, and after, before you took it over, I always had a kind of a feeling that I was chained down. I felt all the time as if I was being smothered, sort of. I knew so much that was really true and that I didn't dare write that sometimes I felt almost dishonest. I tell you I feel like a free man for the first time since I started in the newspaper game; and I think that story shows the way I feel, too. I meant it should. I just sort of put everything I had into writing that story, just sort of to show you that I appreciate being free to write the truth and to prove to you that your sort of a policy for a paper will get results."

Pickering skimmed quickly through the story his young reporter had given him, and then very carefully laid it on the desk. He did not look up to meet the young man's eager eyes, but thoughtfully regarded the shiny brass knob of his desk drawer.

"Just what was your idea in writing that story?" he asked after a little pause.

The young reporter leaned forward with one hand on the desk and explained enthusiastically:

"Why, you see, young Mrs. Jenkins was a beautiful girl, only nineteen years old, and awfully popular with all the smartest folks in town. There were lots of young fellows just crazy to marry her—just like I tell it there in the story—but none of them had much money—see? Well, old Jenkins, he was sixty-four years old and had a lot of money—see? He went after her, and she didn't like him a bit, but her folks were poor, sort of, and her mother kept egging at her to marry old man Jenkins for his money—see? All just like I got it written there in the story. It's all true, every bit of it. So finally she gave in to her mother and married the old fool, and now she's living with him in his big house up on Main Street, and she has servants, and a car, and everything that money can buy, and she's just miserable. She looks ten years older than she did when she married old Jenkins; and

now he's got over being so mushy and sweet to her and all, like he was just when they were first married, and he talks to her sharp, like she was his hired girl or something. Mrs. Driver, who lives next door, heard him swear at her one night last week when the windows were open, 'cause she went to pour some liniment on his leg where his rheumatism is bad, and got some acid or something like that, that burned him some. Mrs. Driver said I could quote her as saying she heard him swear at her. She said if she had to, she'd even come into court and tell what it was he said when he swore, and everything. Oh, I've got my facts all straight, all right enough! I know enough for that. It's all true!"

Pickering kept his eyes on the brass knob. He appeared to be studying some problem that perplexed him.

"Just why did you write it?" he persisted. "What was your object?"

"I wanted to make her sacrifice worth something," the young reporter explained solemnly, a quality of youthful exaltation in his tone. "I wanted to show up what her fool mother did to her when she went and egged her on to marry that old fossil that's old enough to be her grandfather, and made a tragedy out of her whole life. I wanted to show it up so's other mothers, in a case like that, maybe 'd have sense enough to keep their noses out of their daughters' affairs and let 'em choose their own mates an' be happy."

Pickering raised his eyes and looked gravely at the young reporter.

"Were you pretty fond of young Mrs. Jenkins before she was married?" he gently inquired.

The young reporter did not answer, but a film of moisture formed in his blue eyes and his Adam's apple became convulsively active.

"How long have you been in the newspaper business?" Pickering asked, without waiting for a verbal answer to his previous question.

"About six months."

Pickering sighed wearily and shook his head.

"Haven't you learned enough in that time to know that no paper could print a a story like that?" he asked.

"You—you mean you won't print it?" the young reporter stammered.

"I can't, son," Pickering replied. "You ought to know that."

The young reporter snatched up his story from the desk and crammed it into his pocket.

"You're just a—a sham and a cheat!" he cried. His voice broke; the welling tears melted the dam of his will, with which he tried to hold them in manly check, and poured down over his flushed cheeks. "You won't let a fellow write the truth any more than old Eggleston would! This newspaper game's just rotten all the way through—that's what it is, and I'm going to quit. I'm through! I'm going to write for magazines, where I'll have the chance to do something worth while. That's what I always meant to do, anyhow, and now I'm going to do it. You can just take your rotten old job and go right straight to hell with it—that's what you can do! I'm going to take this very same story that you won't print in your no-good paper, and I'm going to fix it over into a fiction story and send it to a magazine. I bet I get it printed, too; and when I do, I'm going to come in and show it to you and give you the laugh. I'm going to—to—"

The boy's voice became submerged under a surge of sobs that would not be denied further, and he turned and rushed from the room with one fond hand pressed tight against the pocket that contained his precious, insulted story.

V

It was late in the afternoon before Pickering was blessed with a caller who brought anything more pleasant than thorns to add to the painful crown of martyrdom that was being enthusiastically pressed down upon the brow of the new editor by the sinful citizens of the benighted town which he had come to enlighten with the bright torch of truth.

The welcome break of sympathetic understanding in the monotony of selfish attempt to take personal advantage of the policy of absolute truth-telling, for which he had so emphatically declared, came to Pickering in the person of Judge Edgar J. Albert, an elderly gentleman of ample girth and of prosperous and benign appearance. The judge wore a close-cropped gray beard. His hair was a trifle long and brushed straight back from his high forehead. His eyes were a bright blue, habitually half-closed in a quizzical sort of squint, which had contracted the flesh above his high cheek-bones into a permanent tracery of

tiny wrinkles that made him appear to be always smiling.

As a matter of fact he was not a judge, and never had been; but he looked the part so perfectly—the part of the sympathetic stage judge, who always sees through the wealthy villain's scheme to oppress the bewildered poor by legal trickery—that people made use of the title in addressing him as naturally as they might drop pennies into the forth-held cup of a ragged man standing on a corner with a cane, a dog on a leash, and blue goggles over his eyes, even though the sign, "Please Help the Blind," were missing from his breast. Pickering knew that Judge Albert was president of the Lucifer and Daly Interurban Traction Company, a large landowner and mortgage-holder, and that he was reputed to be the wealthiest and most influential man in the town.

"Just the sort of a clean-cut, upstanding young fellow I expected to find," the judge said abruptly, when the introduction was accomplished. He settled his considerable bulk comfortably in an office chair that squeaked out a chorus of combined protest and warning as he entrusted his weight to its racked and aged frame. "Yours is a worthy ambition, Mr. Pickering, and I'm glad to welcome you to our little town."

"I'm glad somebody's glad I'm here," Pickering said rather ruefully.

"Been some discords in the harmony of welcome?" the judge questioned.

"Been plenty of discords, but no note of either harmony or welcome until you came in," Pickering admitted. "People here seemed to think my announcement that I was going to tell the truth meant that I was going to defy the libel laws and open my columns to all the malicious gossip and slanderous personal opinion that any busybody cared to whisper in my ear. When they find that such is not the case, they accuse me of being a fraud and a cheat."

Pickering told the tale of his day's adventures with Jones, Smithers, his reporter, and others who had called to take advantage of what they had misconceived to be an opportunity to get their personal spites into public print, dignified with the label of truth. The judge laughed heartily.

"They'll get your idea in time," he assured Pickering. "Of course, all practical men of the world know that truth is a relative term of varying degrees of virtue, according to period and circumstance, and that if imprudently told to the wrong people at an inopportune time, it may prove a powerful force for evil."

Pickering extracted from this expression of opinion a suspicion that Judge Albert was looking for a crack in his determination that would accommodate a lever of argument which might serve to pry him loose from his position.

"Don't get me wrong on this thing, judge," he said earnestly. "You represent what amounts to big business in this town, and big business always and everywhere uses that argument of yours when it's caught stealing melons in the public patch and doesn't want to be bawled out. Now the chances are that you and I won't always, if ever, agree on the truth about political and business matters. The chances are still less that we'll ever agree on whether truth, when published about such subjects, is vicious or virtuous. I'm reasonably certain that I shall feel it my duty to print a lot of stuff, both editorially and in the news, of which you will heartily disapprove. I'm in dead earnest about this thing, judge, and I'm going to run this paper independent of any influence other than my own conscience."

"Well said, my boy!" the judge said heartily. "I have no doubt that you and I will disagree on many issues and particulars of policy. Be a dull world if we were all of one mind, now wouldn't it? And it would be a savage world if all of us who are of different minds on certain issues and methods should permit our differences of opinion to prohibit friendship. My judgment of the degree of my omniscience is modest enough to permit me the hope that you may prove to be a power for good in this little town of ours, even if you don't always—or ever—agree with my views on subjects under discussion. Where are you stopping?"

"At the Central Hotel."

"Oh, yes! Peculiarly uncomfortable little hostelry, isn't it?"

"I've refused to eat a meal or stay overnight in better places," Pickering admitted; "but that was when and where I had some still better place as an alternative."

"Made any plans for a permanent place to put up?"

"Not as yet. I've been here only a few days, you know, and I've been pretty busy."

The judge nodded understanding.

"There isn't much in the way of accommodation here for a young bachelor like yourself, coming into town a stranger. The hotels are impossible, and you're likely to find that boarding with the sort of people who take in boarders as a business is a pretty dreary experience. Now I've got a pretty big place up here on Main Street, and nobody living there but my daughter Agnes and me. I want you to pack up your things and come on up there and try us out for a spell. I'm a lonely old widower and you're a lonely young bachelor. I've got more room than I need and you haven't got enough. As long as you're sure we shall disagree on most things, we ought to be able to find material for argument to lighten any time that gets heavy on our hands. What do you say?"

"Why, I—I don't know what to say," Pickering faltered. "It's good of you, but I don't want to impose."

"No imposition," the judge assured him heartily. "I don't know offhand what board and room costs in this town, but we'll find out, and whatever it is you can pay. Try it, anyway, for a few weeks. If the arrangement isn't suitable either to you or to us, we'll acknowledge it frankly, and you can look for some other place. How about it?"

"You're shade in the desert, judge," Pickering declared warmly. "When shall I come?"

"Come along now," the judge suggested. "My car's outside. We'll drive around to the hotel to get your things and go right up there."

"I'm being subsidized," Pickering protested with a pretense of great alarm, as he reached eagerly for his hat. "And, gosh, how I do enjoy it! Lead on!"

VI

JUDGE ALBERT, his daughter Agnes, and the comforts of their well-appointed home formed a combination that was the only antidote of pleasure Pickering had to aid him in withstanding the poison of ill-will with which the townspeople fed him copiously during the succeeding three months.

The daughter was a slender, blond, fluffy little thing with baby blue eyes that widened in flattering amazement and admiration when she gave ear to Pickering's exposition of his ideals and ambitions, and of the difficulties he encountered in attempting to realize them. She testified in reverent, girlish tones to her intense admiration of men who "did things," who sacrificed themselves for the good of humanity, and who won their way against the allied powers of human greed and inertia to a final triumph of righteousness. She never left Pickering room for doubt that she regarded him as a shining example of the highest type of the altruistic men she so frankly admired.

There were many warm moonlight nights when they sat together on the wide, fragrant, vine-masked porch fronting the quiet street arched over with graceful old elms, and discussed life in a broad way. That is to say, Pickering discussed life in a broad way and Agnes contributed a sweet variety of agreements, such as:

"That's true. I never thought of it that way before. How clear you make it all!"

"That's a wonderful thought. I must remember that."

"Have you felt that too? I didn't know any one else had ever had just that feeling about it."

"Yes, but so few of us realize the truth of that."

"Oh, if you could only make all these people see it as I see it, your work would be done!"

"It must be wonderful to be able to understand and analyze as you do!"

She did Pickering good. It might further be truthfully said that she did him well; for certainly he was well done after two months' steady application of the warmth of her sweet flattery. His moody periods of studying Clare Knowlton's picture when alone occurred less and less often as time went on, and he became increasingly unconscious of the dull, steady hurt in his heart. He began to have visions of a nice little cottage in Lucifer, with a lawn and a large porch and some one who understood and appreciated his better nature.

His periods of playing chess and arguing with the judge were somewhat less poignantly pleasant, but he enjoyed them. The judge often—nay, nearly always—disagreed with the paper's policy, but he was friendly in his opposition—and futile.

The rest of the people in town were busy hissing Pickering's act. He thought he had struck a popular note when he got after the mayor of the town, who owned a brickyard and a gravel pit, the products of which he sold to the city for paving purposes at a considerable profit. Pickering exposed this, and several citizens came in to thank him

warmly for his good deed; but shortly after the exposé there was a noticeable diminution in the amount of new paving provided for by the town council. People who had expected to have streets before their residences improved figured out cause and effect, remembered that the mayor had been charging only a slightly exorbitant price for the material he had sold the city, recalled that he was a church-goer, a good husband and father, and always ready to do a good turn for a friend, and thereupon launched a campaign of denunciation at poor Pickering.

The local Chamber of Commerce was advertising for factories to come to Lucifer. Pickering read the pamphlets setting forth the advantages Lucifer was able to offer to new industries, and was shocked. The statements set forth in the pamphlet were undoubtedly exaggerations. The *Herald* prominently called attention to these overstatements, and argued editorially that no permanent good could ever be accomplished by what amounted to fraudulent advertising. The papers in neighboring and rival towns picked up the stuff and reprinted it, holding Lucifer up to scorn and ridicule as a town so poverty-stricken in honor and in industries that it was willing to go to any lengths of misrepresentation in order to keep itself going.

Whereupon the Chamber of Commerce and all the business men in the town discovered that Pickering was a bold bolshevik and an all-round bad citizen, and boycotted him.

On that particular campaign he did enlist the sympathy of many of the laboring men in the town. He retained that sympathy until the night of the moonlight picnic and dance of the employees of the Higginbotham Farm Implement Works, the largest industry in the place.

Pickering discovered that it was the intention of the merry-makers to annul the Eighteenth Amendment; that beer and whisky were to be sold openly on the grounds by representatives of an employees' club. He stirred up the town marshal, and finally goaded him into raiding the picnic, where intoxicants were found to be on sale. The next morning he ran an editorial bragging about what he had done, and the next night he was well beaten up while on his way home. The working people of the town were enraged against him, and accused him of being secretly in league with the big interests in a conspiracy to deprive the poor man of his glass of beer, while the rich had all they wanted.

Then Pickering got after the Higginbotham Farm Implement Works. The town had donated to the factory a large site, only a small part of which was occupied by the factory buildings. The company had cut up the rest of the tract into town lots and built small houses thereon, which they rented or sold on time payments.

Pickering found that the town council was providing for paving and all manner of improvements on the company's property; that the factory, as an added inducement to locate in Lucifer, had been guaranteed light and power at half-price for twenty years; that this bargain light and power was being used in the houses which the company rented out, and was charged for by the company at full rates. He went after this graft hard, and was just going well on his campaign when Eggleston himself unexpectedly appeared in Lucifer.

"About this attack on the Higginbotham Company," Eggleston said uncomfortably, when Pickering's surprise had subsided. "Of course, the paper is yours; but after all, I did give it to you, and if you want to oblige me lay off of them a little."

"What's the idea?" Pickering inquired.

"As long as the capitalist system endures the evils of the system will endure," Eggleston explained. "It is futile to attempt to abolish the attendant evils as long as the system exists. Perhaps I haven't explained to you that my sole source of income is the stock in the Higginbotham Company that was left me by my father. I am informed that if you are successful in this campaign, my income from that stock may be considerably diminished. Now don't misunderstand me! If it were possible to overthrow the system by sacrificing my material interests, I think you know that I would glory in doing so. As it is, I believe that my income from that stock gives me the opportunity to do more good, working for the cause, for the ultimate overthrow of the system that is the root of all industrial and social evil, than you could possibly do by effecting a temporary remedy that would not be an effective blow at the fundamental wrong. You get my point, I hope?"

"At last I do, Eggleston," Pickering agreed. "I've been a long time getting it, but I'm getting it now. The point is that you're just a vain little poseur without an atom of sincerity in your make-up. You've

got money enough to live on comfortably, and you can attract more attention by being a radical socialist than in any other way; so that's the part you play!"

"I was afraid you'd take the narrow view of this, and so misunderstand me, Pickering," Eggleston said with an assumption of injured innocence. "Now if you'll just reason with me for a minute—"

"I'm going to reason with you," Pickering declared firmly, as he rose and gripped Eggleston by the collar. "You got me into this thing, and I went into it in earnest. I'm going to carry it through in spite of you, because I'm still in earnest. I'm going to prove my sincerity to you by giving you a nice licking for not being as much in earnest as I am!"

Whereupon Mr. Pickering punched the squirming, protesting Mr. Eggleston on the nose. Then he carefully hit him in the right eye, immediately subsequent to which action of violence he treated the left eye in like manner.

Eggleston was no fighter. He refused even to attempt to find out how much of a fighter he might be by making any belligerent effort. He merely wriggled and begged. Pickering swore with disgust at his cringing refusal to resent anything done to him.

"I can't fight a jellyfish in the way I'd fight a man," he confessed. "If you won't take a licking like a man, take this, like the dirty sniveling little coward you are!"

The "this" to which Pickering referred turned out to be a large bottle of ink poured over Eggleston's head and complicated by the entire contents of a big paste-pot well kneaded into his hair and scalp and face by willing fingers.

"Now get out of my sight," Pickering ordered, when the decorating was done to his taste. "And take care you don't let me see you again, because, if I do, I'm going to give way to my inclinations altogether and pick you apart to see what you've got inside of you in place of a man's heart and mind. The paper's legally mine until the two years are up, and I'm going to run it to suit my conscience until I go broke—which won't be long, if that's any satisfaction to you. Now beat it!"

VII

THE quarrel with Eggleston left but a slight regret on the surface of Pickering's memory. He had never really liked the man, and was not wholly surprised at the evidence of his insincerity. He was far more seriously disturbed to find his own conscience directing him along a path of action which he feared would bring him eventually to an ugly conflict with Judge Albert.

One evening, sitting on the porch with the judge, he decided to bring the matter to discussion.

"Judge, you've taken me to the bosom of your home and warmed me, and now I'm about to come to life and bite," he said abruptly.

"Good of you to rattle first," the judge drawled. "What's it all about?"

"The franchise of the Lucifer and Daly Interurban Traction Company runs out next month," Pickering reminded him. "You can probably guess the rest."

"You're going to fight the renewal of it?"

"I've got to fight a renewal without some legitimate compensation to the city," Pickering argued earnestly. "You people have been getting by with larceny, judge. That franchise is worth real money, and you've had it free."

"Dividends been mighty small lately," the judge said. "Any considerable payment for the renewal of the franchise would be a hungry rat in the profit bin."

"Your dividends have been at a low rate because your stock is as full of water as the Seven Seas," Pickering retorted. "I've got to fight you on this. I hope our personal relations are not going to get bloody noses and black eyes in the mix-up. That would hurt."

The judge chuckled.

"As Jim Pickering, you're a very delightful fellow, and I'm glad to have your friendship and keep it," he said. "As the radical and rampageous editor of the Lucifer *Herald*, you're my avowed enemy as well as a menace to the community. I'm glad to have you for an enemy, and I'll trim you to a frazzle in the fight you insist on making. You're in for an awful licking, boy!"

"Maybe," Pickering admitted; "but I'll bet I leave some of my hoof-prints on the people that beat me. By the way, when's the thing coming before the council?"

"Wouldn't you like to know?" the judge chuckled. "Warfare and politics aside, son, do you think you can spare time off from remaking this naughty world according to your personal specifications to motor over to Tuppertown with Agnes and me to-morrow? Surprise party on over there

for my old friend Dr. Barstow. I think you met his two daughters when they were here to see Agnes. Be a lawn party and dancing in the evening, I suppose. Be a nice moonlight drive back, weather permitting. How about it?"

"Guess I can trust the world to the inevitable laws of nature and the doubtful mercy of mankind for one day," Pickering agreed. "What time are you going to start?"

"Like to get away early in the morning, if you can make it," the judge said. "On the way over I'd like to stop a few hours at old man Livermore's, on Sucker Creek, and test out the fishing. Can you start right after breakfast?"

Pickering decided that he could.

"Then I'll be ambling on to bed," the judge said, easing himself slowly up from his chair.

"No hard feelings then, judge, on that other matter?" Pickering asked.

"Lord love you, son! No," the judge insisted warmly. "You've got a bad beating coming to you, and I'm going to administer it personally, without let or hundrance, as the fellow says; but if you can keep on smiling while your getting it, I don't see why I should frown while I'm giving it to you. Night, Jim!"

Pickering had a good time at the surprise party in Tuppertown. He had most of the dances with Agnes, and there was a moon. During the ride home late at night he held Agnes's hand, and when he reached his room he took Clare Knowlton's picture from the bureau drawer and studied it quite calmly. It evoked no emotion other than the mild ghost of sorrow that is materialized from the graveyard of memory by some object or incident that recalls to mind a dead and buried pain. He assured himself that his love for Clare was quite dead; and the assurance was followed by a speculation, only mildly sad, as to the happiness that might have been willing to follow him along the course charted by his conscience.

He then turned his thoughts to Agnes. There was a girl who really understood a fellow, who appreciated constancy to ideals! If Agnes loved a man, she would stick to him at any cost, and would love him the more if his path of duty became rough and painful of traverse. He wondered if Agnes did love a man, and came to a vague but tentatively affirmative decision that was gratifying. He partially determined to speak to Agnes about it some day, and went to sleep very well satisfied with himself and with the possibilities he was sure the future held for him.

But he did not permit the enticing spirit of romance to lure him from the immediate business of fighting Judge Albert and the Lucifer and Daly Interurban. Time enough, he told himself virtuously, to think fond thoughts about Agnes after he had dealt stern blows to her father.

The moment he reached his office in the morning he called in his best—and only—reporter.

"Dig around to-day and see if you can get a line on when this franchise renewal thing is coming up before the council," he instructed him.

"Why, that came up at the meeting last night," the reporter informed him.

Pickering said nothing. He did nothing. He thought nothing. He just sat.

"Sure!" the reporter continued. "They called a special session last night and renewed the franchise for ninety-nine years. I've got the story."

Pickering had no recollection of what he said or did immediately after the reporter broke the news to him. When he again became conscious of place and time, he found himself on the street, walking furiously in the direction of Judge Albert's home. He had no plan of action, no idea as to what he would do or say. Thought was submerged by the anger that flooded his being, and in its place blind instinct ruled him.

Agnes met him in the hallway and shrank from him with an involuntary exclamation of fright.

"Jim! What's the matter?" she asked timidly. "You—you look so strange. What is it?"

Pickering tried to speak, and was obliged to continue the attempt for a full half-minute before he could force words from his lips

"Where is your father?" he asked huskily.

"He's just gone to the office, Jim," the girl answered. "What is it? Tell me!"

"I will tell you," Pickering said hotly. "He's cheated me — that's what's the matter. He took me into his home here, and treated me as his friend, and then betrayed me. He talked me into going over to Tuppertown with you yesterday, and

while I was gone the council renewed the franchise to the company. He used friendship as a trap to—to—why, Agnes! Why, Agnes girl! What's the matter?"

Agnes had drawn herself stiffly erect, and her eyes were scintillant with anger.

"You get out of this house, and don't you ever come back!" she raged at him. "My father a cheat? He brought you here to his own home and you say that of him? Don't you stop even to pack your things! You get out, and get out now!"

Pickering's wrath cooled in inverse ratio to the rapidly rising heat of the girl's anger.

"Wait! I—I want to explain, Agnes," he stammered. "Let me tell you. Don't you see, your father took advantage of our friendly relations to—"

"I won't hear it!" Agnes interrupted fiercely, stamping her foot and pressing her hands over her ears. "I won't hear another word from you! I never want to see you again, you—you detestable ingrate! Now go—go!"

Pickering went with all his compelling anger cooled to chill, sick misery within him. When he reached Judge Albert's office, he was resentful and sullen, but incapable of achieving a state of strong wrath.

"Well, you put it over on me, didn't you?" he mumbled to the judge.

"Franchise thing, you mean?" the judge said, blowing a drift of cigar-smoke ceilingward as he leaned back in his swivel chair. "Sure I did! Told you I was going to do, didn't I?"

"It was a damned dirty trick!" Pickering declared spiritlessly.

The judge arched his eyebrows and made a gesture of dissent.

"We agreed that we were going to have a battle, son," he reminded Pickering; "but we didn't subscribe to any rules of warfare. Personally, I didn't promise not to scratch or bite or hit below the belt. I told you I was going to give you a licking, and I did. No hard feelings, I hope?"

"You hope wrong," Pickering said sullenly. "You took advantage of our friendship to double-cross me. That's the way I look at it. I went up to the house looking for you, and I met Agnes."

"Yes?"

"She told me to get out and not come back. I—I told her the way I felt about what you'd done, and—"

"Too bad!" the judge said gravely. "Sorry you did that, son. That sort of takes things out of our hands to a certain extent, doesn't it?"

"I get you," Pickering said. "I'll send a man from the hotel to get my things."

The judge rose and thoughtfully walked the length of the office.

"What are you going to do now, son?" he inquired.

"I'm going to turn this town upside down and spank it!" Pickering flared. "I came here to run a decent paper in a decent way, and to tell the truth about things without regard for any influence but the truth. You've got me licked—I know that; but I can keep the sheet alive a little while longer, and I I can do a lot of damage with it. I don't know how much, but whatever I can do before the sheriff gets me is going to be done. I'm licked, but before I quit fighting I'm going to make this town a byword in the mouths of decent people wherever the *Herald* is read or quoted!"

The judge shook his head and uttered a rapid succession of "Tut-tut's," indicating mild aggrievement and disappointment.

"I hoped I might be able to sandpaper you down to good sense, son," he said; "but I guess it's no use trying now. As to the rest of it, you ain't going to do the damage you spoke about, and you'd save yourself a lot of trouble by not trying."

"I suppose the rain makes the ocean wetter, but when you've got as much water in you as an ocean has it doesn't make any difference," Pickering retorted. "More trouble doesn't mean anything to a man who's got the hard-luck market as near cornered as I have. I suppose you and I might as well make this good-by."

"Seems so," the judge admitted regretfully. "Good luck, son!"

"Good luck!" Pickering exclaimed bitterly. "That's so funny I can almost laugh at it myself. I wish I could thank you for your kindness, but I can't. Good-by."

VIII

When Pickering returned to the office after his interview with the judge, he found awaiting him a telegram that brought a wistful smile to his lips. The message was from two baseball writers traveling with the New York American League club. It contained a slangy invitation to meet them in Chicago while they were there with the Yanks. Pickering read, and, remembering days of careless good fellowship spent with them, decided to take a short vacation

from his misery. He made arrangements to be gone for four days, and caught the train for Chicago.

When he arrived at the appointed hotel in the Loop, he learned that his friends would not arrive for several hours. He registered, went to his room, and sprawled wearily on the bed, resigning himself completely to the sickness of stale gloom that pervaded his being.

The mental picture of Clare Knowlton became agonizingly clear to his mind's eye. He rediscovered the fact that she was supremely desirable, sweet, sane, and wholesome. Also he began to suspect that she understood a fellow rather well, after all. The recollection of his mental inconstancy during the period when he had given over his imagination to be shaped into vague dreams of happiness by thoughts of Agnes Albert tortured him with a poignant sense of shame.

He had been in his room for perhaps half an hour when there was a knock on his door, and in answer to his response a bell-boy entered.

"You care about buying some good liquor?" the boy asked.

Pickering sat up suddenly, and his eyes brightened.

"Sure!" he exclaimed. "So dry down in the little town I come from I'd almost forgotten there was such a thing in the world as liquor, good or bad. Can you get it for me?"

"I can't get it for you myself, but I can give you a card to a place where you can get real old bottled-in-bond stuff," the boy explained. "You go up to that place, ring the bell, and give this card to the guy that comes to the door. Just tell him Al sent you, and he'll fix you up."

The address on the card proved to be that of an old-fashioned, dingy residence on Dearborn Street, a little way north of the river, in a block largely given over to small tailoring establishments, cigar-stands and cheap clothing stores. The grouchy, untidy old man who answered Pickering's ring admitted him to the ill-lighted, dusty hallway, grunted non-committally at the mention of Al, left him waiting for a few minutes, and returned with two quarts of what he declared was good bonded stuff done up in plain brown wrapping-paper. Pickering paid him, at a rate per ounce approximately equivalent to that of the pre-war charge for the most precious of imported perfumes, and left with his purchase under his arm.

Half-way down the block a heavy-set, large-featured man wearing a dark slouch hat touched him on the shoulder.

"I s'pose that's a couple o' pounds o' dog meat yuh got in that bundle there," he sneered; "or a new hat for your wife, or a doll for your sick baby, or somep'n like that, huh?"

"What's it to you what I've got in this bundle?" Pickering retorted with a show of bravado that masked a sickening certainty that he was about to be pinched with the goods.

"Nothin' to me," the stranger said with mocking carelessness, flicking back his coat lapel and permitting Pickering a glance at a silver shield attached to his vest. "That is, it's nothin' to me if it's dog meat or a hat for your wife yuh got there. If it should be booze, now, it might be different, huh? Mebbe it might be a good deal to me then. Of course it ain't booze—it never is; but if you'll take a little walk with me, we'll have a look at it anyhow, just to make sure."

"It's booze," Pickering admitted helplessly. "Where do we go from here?"

"I'll show you the way," the stranger volunteered.

They turned the corner and met Judge Albert.

"Why, hello, Jim!" the judge greeted Pickering, with an accent of astonishment. "Judson!" he went on, with a still greater expression of surprise. "Well, well! How are you?" He hesitated for a moment, looking expectantly from Pickering to the officer. "You two know each other?" he continued.

"I don't know this young fellow from Adam's off ox, judge," the officer said. "Sorry if he's a friend o' yours, 'cause I just picked him up with a couple o' bottles o' hooch under his arm."

"Why, Jim!" the judge exclaimed. "I'm surprised."

"Surprised!" Pickering repeated sullenly. "You don't know what the word means. When you want to find out, ask me. I'll tell you. I know more about surprise right now than any man living." He stared at the judge and shook his head reproachfully. "It's such a big world," he continued plaintively. "It does seem as if you might have found some other place in it to be right at this moment. Where'd you come from?"

"Lucifer," said the judge. "Just ran up for the day on a little matter of business."

"You must have come on the same train," Pickering groaned. "And you had to be here just now! You know this joy-killer who's got me in tow?"

"Judson? Yes, indeed," the judge said. "He used to be sheriff down in our county."

"Well, does your knowing him do me any good?" Pickering persisted desperately.

"I don't know about that, Jim," the judge said hesitantly. "He's an officer of of the law, you know, and sworn to his duty." He paused and thoughtfully stroked his chin. "Will you give me a few minutes alone with Mr. Pickering?" he asked the officer.

"Sure," said Judson. "Don't lose him, judge. I'm going to need him in my business when you're through with him."

The enforcement officer walked away and left the judge with Pickering.

"Be quite a juicy little piece of scandal down in Lucifer," the judge mused aloud. "The young editor who caused the raid on the picnic, and who's stood for enforcement of all laws in letter and spirit, pinched for having boot-leg booze on his person! Nasty mess, Jim!"

"I'll never dare show my face back there if it gets out," Pickering groaned.

"Just what I was thinking, Jim," the judge said. "And I was also thinking that if you should happen to decide never to show your face back there, this thing might be fixed up so that it wouldn't get out, eh?"

That particular brand of intelligence which has been known to many generations of the readers of successive currents of popular fiction as "a great light" suddenly illuminated Pickering's mind. The bell-boy with the information as to where to buy liquor, the enforcement agent miraculously on hand to make the arrest as Pickering came from the house where the purchase had been made, the presence of the judge at the psychological moment—all this combined in a fabric of circumstance that might be called coincidence, but probably was something quite different.

"Is this a plant?" Pickering inquired truculently.

The judge half shut his eyes and stared intently at nothing a long way off.

"A plant, Jim?" he murmured thoughtfully. "A plant? Well, now, if it should be a plant, as you suggest, just suppose for a moment that I'm a professor of botany and you're a pupil of mine, and I'll tell you something about the nature of this plant. It's a peculiar growth. Neither one of us knows definitely, as yet, just what sort of fruit it's going to bear. In fact, we don't know whether it's going to bear fruit at all. It might turn out to be a trouble plant, and be just loaded down with a crop of embarrassment for you. Then again I might cut the darned thing down and throw it away before it grows up enough for any of us to tell what it might become if it was permitted to develop. Do you follow me, Jim?"

"I'm hooked," Pickering admitted sullenly, after a moment's hesitation. "I can't go back to Lucifer as long as you've got a club like this to hit me with. It's a bargain. I'll keep away from your damned old town. Cut the line and let me go!"

"Good!" the judge exclaimed. He raised his voice and spoke to the enforcement officer. "All right, Judson! See you later!"

The officer waved his hand and walked away. The judge turned to Pickering and smiled genially.

"That's that," he said in a tone of satisfaction. "Now let's go some place where we can have a little quiet talk."

Pickering stared.

"Quiet talk!" he repeated. "You want to talk to me? You invite me into your house as a guest, double-cross me all the way through, and then ask me to come have a quiet talk with you as if nothing had happened!"

The judge hesitantly put his hand on the boy's shoulder, and a flush of embarrassment reddened his face. There was a wistful note in his voice when he spoke. "I like you, Jim," he said gently. "I liked you from the first. Before we say good-by for keeps I want to put you straight on a few things. Will you give me the chance?"

Pickering nodded.

"I'm curious," he admitted. "You're the most complete and conscienceless crook I ever ran into. I want to hear what you've got to say."

IX

SETTLED on a comfortable leather lounge in a club in the Loop, to which the judge had led the way, Pickering lit a cigarette and looked expectantly at his companion.

"In the first place, Jim, I'm going to take over and run the Lucifer *Herald* myself," the judge said. "I've got an agreement with me that I'll want you to sign later on, releasing Eggleston from the contract he made with you. I've made the other arrangement with him."

"Go ahead!" Pickering said grimly. "First time I've ever been held up and robbed by a friend and then invited to sit down to a friendly talk in which I'm told that I'm to be robbed again. You're so bad you're good!"

"Jim, I suppose you think that I invited you to my home in the first place with the deliberate intention of gaining your confidence and then double-crossing you?" the judge said.

"You read my mind like a book," Pickering said with a mocking pretense of amazement.

The judge sighed.

"You're wrong, Jim," he insisted earnestly. "I asked you to my home because, in the first place, I honestly hoped that you were going to be a fine, invigorating, cleansing influence in our little town; second, because I was very much attracted to you personally; and, last and least of all, because I wanted to have you where I could bat you on the head in case you developed into a civic pest instead of a partner. I'm probably sorrier than you are that I finally had to bat you on the head."

"Meaning that I developed into a civic pest?" Pickering asked, impressed in spite of himself by Judge Albert's earnestness.

"Exactly," the judge agreed.

"Because I tried to stop your franchise steal?"

"Nope," the judge said. "In that matter I had to act in my capacity as president of the company and do the best I could to protect the stockholders. If you had beaten me in that battle, I'd have smiled and wished you luck. I beat you, and you turned in to tear up the town and throw away the pieces."

"And that made me a pest, eh?"

"Nope," the judge again disagreed. "You took that attitude because you had already become a pest."

Pickering shook his head in honest amazement.

"I don't get you," he confessed.

The judge lit a large cigar and slowly settled himself into the position of greatest comfort that the lounge afforded.

"There isn't any such thing as truth, Jim," he said, with apparent irrelevance. "The truth about any particular thing is always the current theory that the majority accept as truth plus or minus your own personal belief or disbelief in that theory. There's no such thing as telling the absolute truth about anything, because there's no way of determining what the absolute truth is. You think you know, and I think I know, and yet our beliefs don't match. Which one of us is right? Maybe you; maybe me; probably neither of us. So, Jim, the only good substitute for truth is the thing we call convention, or custom, which is nothing more or less than a practical compromise between all the various theories as to what absolute truth is, arrived at after wars and panics and plagues and all sorts of unpleasantnesses brought about by the attempts of the various groups of theorists to make everybody accept their particular conception of truth and regulate themselves by it.

"That's not all, Jim. I want to tell you that the only kind of a truth-teller who's worth anything to any community is the fellow who always works to tell the kind of truth that's going to do the most people the most good. The fellow that tells what he thinks is truth just because he thinks it's truth, and even though he knows it's going to hurt a lot of people and make a lot of trouble, is just a plain pest. He's the kind of a fellow who comes into a place where most of the people are getting along pretty well, getting married and having homes and children and good enough funerals at the end of the trail, and starts in to make a combination insane asylum and poorhouse out of the place by converting everybody to what he thinks is absolute truth. He's the kind of a fellow who says to a man:

"'I know you've got a good job and a nice home and a good wife and smart children, but if you just knew the truth as I know it, you not only wouldn't have any of those things, but you wouldn't even want to have 'em.'

"Then he goes to work and tries to force his kind of truth into the man's brain, and if the man doesn't accept it or submit to it, why, the truth-teller says he's a dumb ox or a thief and a liar and not deserving of any consideration. Take our little town, Jim—things aren't perfect there. There's some graft that hadn't ought to be. Some people get more that deserve less, and some

get less that deserve more. Things ain't all run just according to the golden rule; but as little towns go nowadays, it's a pretty good little place. It got to be the kind of a good little place it is by having in it a lot of men that maybe put over a little sharp dealing on Saturday, and then go to church and pray on Sunday, and do both pretty well; the kind of men that maybe lie a little when they're swapping horses or selling real estate, and then turn around and lose a lot of money standing pat on some principle that they really think is vital to the welfare of the town or State or nation —in other words, just ordinary, human, American men, Jim.

"Now I think there's too many men like me got power there for the real good of the town, Jim. I do! I'd like to see some strong youngster come into that town and give the fellows like me a good battle. I'd like to see him come in there and lambaste us when we are bad, laugh a little when he loses, crow a whole lot when he wins, and get in and work with us whenever we're all liable to lose. I hoped that's what you'd do, Jim. You probably don't believe me, but that's a fact."

"I'm not so sure I don't believe you," Pickering said slowly

"I hope you do, son," the judge said earnestly. "You're a good boy, and I like you, but you're trying to drive on the left-hand side of the road, and the traffic convention in this country says to drive on the right-hand side. Maybe it would be better to drive on the left, but they don't do it that way here, and any one who tries it is not only going to get hurt; he's going to hurt a lot of other people and tie up the traffic so that the butter and eggs and meat don't get to town on time, and then a lot more people are going to go hungry. The trouble with some people to-day, Jim —and it's been the trouble with some people ever since there's been people—is that they've seen something they're sure is absolute truth, and they want to make everybody see that same truth and practise it, no matter how bad it hurts. They don't care anything about prosperity, or happiness, or love, or any of the other things that make it worth while to keep off the track when the train's coming, just so long as everybody sees truth their way. Maybe their way's right, Jim, and I don't blame them for trying to get other people to see it that way; but when they insist on putting out the light and not letting anybody see at all, unless everybody does see their way, then they're just plain ordinary pests, Jim, and they need to be stepped on. As long as they help keep the light burning, I don't care what they try to make people see; but when I put it over on you in that franchise thing down in Lucifer, Jim, instead of smiling and getting ready to give me a proper lambasting the next time we tied up in a fight, you swore to do your best to put out the light. That's when I began to make my plans to put you out of the running."

"Do you think it was ethical for you to take advantage of me as a friend in your home to get me out of town while they put over that franchise business?" Pickering asked.

"I don't know, Jim," the judge said doubtfully. "That's always going to worry me. I wish I hadn't had to do it; but I did have to. My duty is to do my darnedest by my associates and the stockholders in that company, and I did it. I wouldn't have been a bit sorry if you'd beat me on that, Jim; but I had to do all I could to beat you. Do you still think I'm just a graceless old crook, Jim?"

"Judge," said Pickering gravely, "if I'd been as unselfishly honest according to my own ideas as you've been according to yours, I'd still be down there in Lucifer trying to reform the town. I'm glad I wasn't that honest, and I'm glad I'm not down there trying to reform the darned town, because I'm not a reformer. I'm just one of the gang. I got tired of working for my paper in New York, not because it was lying, but because it was printing the truth according to the ideas of the man who owned it, instead of expressing my own personal interpretation of truth. I took the *Herald* down in Lucifer not because I wanted to tell the truth, but because I wanted to tell what I personally thought was the truth. In other words, I wanted to express my own opinions as owner of the paper, same as the owner of the paper I had worked on was expressing his. That idea of the thing's not original with me, judge. A young lady in New York told me that quite a while ago, and if I've got time to make the Broadway Limited I'm going to see her to-morrow night and tell her she was right. That's not all I'm going to tell her, judge, but that's what I'm going to tell her first."

Pickering rose and held out his hand.

"Good-by, judge," he said heartily.

"Good luck! I've just about got time to make that train."

The judge took his hand and gripped it hard. There was a film of moisture over his eyes, and his voice was husky when he spoke.

"Good-by, son," he said. "You don't feel hard toward me?"

"Not a bit."

"Do you think I was right in doing what I did, Jim?"

Pickering shook his head.

"I don't know, judge," he confessed. "It's all too deep for me."

"I don't know, either," the judge admitted. "I wish I did, but I never will. It's a hell of a world, ain't it, Jim?"

"Only world we've got," Pickering reminded him cheerfully. "It's going to look pretty good to me if that young lady in New York can make use of a ring that hasn't been doing any one any good for a long time. All I want out of it is a good job, and her, and a little spot in the traffic on the right-hand side of the road. Good-by judge!"

Late the next evening Jim Pickering sat on a large easy chair in a studio apartment in New York. Clare Knowlton sat on Jim.

"Do you mean that, Jim?" she whispered softly, in answer to a long and fervent declaration of sentiment that he had just completed. "Is that the truth?"

"No!" said Pickering emphatically. "It's my personal opinion, and in this case, at least, that's all that counts!"

THE END

BALLADE OF SWEET-WHILE-IT-LASTED

SUMMER has gone and the aster is here,
And the leaves through the woodlands are flying;
The gay-colored world grows somber and sere,
And it's sad, what's the use of denying?
But, again, what's the use of our sighing?
When we're back once again at the desk and the store,
Let's say, 'mid our selling and buying:
"Sweet while it lasted! What could you ask more?"

Loving is over, and parting draws near,
And the time comes at last for good-bying,
For the last aching kiss and the last falling tear;
Yet there's not the least good in our crying.
Oh, love, but it's harder than dying!
Yet 'twill help us to say, when the heart is too sore,
And you to forget me are trying:
"Sweet while it lasted! What could you ask more?"

Life, too, like love, some day of some year—
Alas, 'tis no hard prophesying—
Must break up its camp and pack up its gear,
And—whither, who knows?—go a hying;
For the Fates their old shuttles are plying;
But still, as we bid farewell at the door,
We'll go on our ways testifying:
"Sweet while it lasted! What could you ask more?"

ENVOI

Prince, let us die as we lived, glorifying
God for this life honey-sweet to the core;
Write it in gold on the place where we're lying:
"Sweet while it lasted! What could you ask more?"

Richard Le Gallienne